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ABSTRACT

A 2-year study examined the leisure reading of 60 and other language arts instruction in elementary school classrooms in west Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, led to the conclusion that many school practices were based upon assumptions of the out-of-school lives of students that were of questionable accuracy. Consequently, the researchers were asked to describe in as much detail as possible the regular routines of the families with which they were working. The researchers did not establish a research schedule but negotiated a series of contacts based on the mutual obligations of friendship. The result was a set of portraits that constituted a case study in some aspect of the culture of literacy. Although most of the reports describe inner city Black families, two reports look at literacy use among relatively recently arrived Southeast Asians. All of the families are poor, and some are on welfare. All of the families are concerned that their children succeed in school, but not at any cost. Two themes that characterize these portraits are (1) the care with which the families organize themselves to make full use of the resources they have to meet the demands of school and the workplace while living lives of dignity and happiness, and (2) the fear that they may not be doing everything they should or could be. The typical posture of a family is, "we will do everything we can to meet the school's demands: however, we will not sacrifice those things that give meaning and dignity to us. School success isn't the only thing important for our children to experience." (HOD)

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# USING LITERACY OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL:

## AN ETHNOGRAPHIC INVESTIGATION

David M. Smith, Ph.D.
Principal Investigator

Final Report

to

The National Institute of Education

Grant No. NIE-G-81-0035

Stephen Cahir, Ph.D.
Project Monitor

April, 16, 1982

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# OVERVIEW OF PERSPECTIVE AND CASE STUDIES

David M. Smith

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# OVERVIEW OF PERSPECTIVE AND CASE STUDIES

## BACKGROUND

### History of the Study

The study reported here grew out of a previous NIE funded effort. (The Ethnographic monitoring of the Acquisition of Reading/Language Arts Skills, Dell H. Hymes, Principal Investigator. Final Report, February 1981.) During the investigation of teacher perceived problems in reading and other language arts instruction in elementary classrooms in West Philadelphia; it became increasingly certain that a great number of school practices were based upon assumptions about the out-of-school lives of students which were of questionable accuracy. Furthermore, it became apparent that these inaccuracies, which were subtle and rooted in the socio-cultural arrangement of the communities, were shared by much of the research literature. They were not the result of laxity in caring or effort on the part of school teachers or administrators who in most cases were careful, and in many cases untiring, in their efforts to understand the children and to structure learning experiences that would meet their needs.

Put simply, many of the "problems" identified by teachers were real enough but did not, from the perspective of parents or children, yield to the kinds of solutions assumed to be available. These "problems" were seen as the inevitable consequences of their life situations. What, for example, may surface in school as a problem of "uncooperative attitude" when a parent does not "live up to his/her contract to check the completion of homework assignments" may be the result of the parent carefully weighing the relative consequences of appearing uncooperative or of appearing uneducated (when the homework assignment contains errors) in the eyes of the teacher. This would not be a trivial decision since parents accurately perceive that teacher expectations of children are influenced by their assumptions as to the ecucational level of parents. (See Watkins report for more context on this issue.)

This is one of the more obvious examples of the clash of values that can lead to inaccurate school assumptions about the life contexts of students. Others are less easily extricated from the social complexities. Gilmore gives us a clue to this complexity in her contrast between a student in a private school whose miswriting of "Blizzard" as "bizzard" became an occasion for general merriment in the classroom and similar situations in the public schools where such mistakes would be treated with great seriousness, resulting in homework assignments to deal with the "problem" of consonant blends. Families of both children share in their desire to make sure that the children lead balanced lives where they experience their share of successes and where they have fun as well as learn to do serious work. However, meeting this goal against a backdrop of school assumption that the child is "O.K." and simply "slips occasionally" is quite a different matter from meeting it in a context where every mistake is seen as a serious threat to success.

This suggests that the much touted cultural discontinuity between school and the lives of "at risk" children is not simply one of form--different language, interactive style, etc.--nor even of values but of function. Social arrangements and other cultural systems are designed to accomodate realities quite different from those assumed in much of the research literature and, implicitly, by many school people. Viewed in this light, the meaning, value and usefulness of literacy cannot be assumed a priori and, indeed, can only emerge from a profound understanding of the culture of literacy characteristic of a particular setting. The study presented here aimed at such an understanding.

While much of the impetus to this study was provided by our experiences in the previous research, another factor was the observation that the well documented drop-off phenomena--the leveling of progress or decline in literacy -related test scores--happened at the point where the learner would be expected to be making the transition from learning literacy skills to the use of these skills for learning. It occured to us (as it has to others) that part of the explanation for this might be found in an understanding of the uses and functions of literacy in the everyday lives of children. Furthermore, this was one of the areas our findings were leading us to suspect where many school assumptions were inaccurate. That is, we were regularly encountering unsubstantiated beliefs that children do little writing or reading outside of school, that their culture is essentially "oral", that they spend their time watching television, that families spend little time together engaged in literacy activities or that children can only deal with simple texts (narrative as opposed to expository).

A great deal of the pedagogy (eg., the assignment of homework to make sure attention was given to specific problems) and virtually all of the support activities of the schools (eg., academic plus programs, parent contracts) were designed to counter these presumed realities. If in fact this situation was substantially different from this, it would explain the limited success of these school efforts, the difficulties in enlisting community support and some of the attitudinal problems of children

Finally, as a result of three previous years' work in the schools and the communities, we were in a position to examine literacy use and function from a perspective not usually available to researchers. The past few years have witnessed a number of research efforts on literacy in out-of-school contexts. (For example, Heath, 1981; Gumperz, 197 ; Anderson, 1981 and Lichter, 1982). For the most part these have focussed upon the acquisition of literacy skills in younger children and have been concerned with the formal aspects of acquisition. Insofar as they have addressed issues of use and function, they have seen these as social dimensions of literacy skills, unlike the present study which looks at the wider culture and attempts to situate literacy within it. This perspective and the resulting pictures of literacy use will be discussed in more detail later.

## The Approach

The substance of this study was largely guided by five very general "hypotheses."

> Reading and writing need not be taught exclusively in the school, and, in fact, a strict adherence to formal educational methods for teaching literacy may limit the potential opportunities for literacy learning and maintenance in homes and communities by alienating parents and creating feelings of unjustified inadequacy in their own competencies.
>
> Literacy acquisition does not require a tight linear order of instruction which breaks down small sets and subsets of skills into isolated sequential hierarchies.
>
> Learners frequently possess and display in out-of-school contexts, skills relevant to using literacy which are not effectively exploited in school learning environments.
>
> The efforts to learn to read and write should not be sustained primarily by a faith in their academic utility.
>
> The uses of reading and writing may differ considerably from community to community and the major benefits, as judged by home and community, may include a variety of rewards from status, power and wealth to intellectual growth and freedom. (Funded Proposal, p. 9.)

While it is accurate to say that the reports presented here seem to affirm these "hypotheses", this was not a major goal of the research. Unlike the previous study, the four site researchers were not asked to find specific areas for focus but to describe in as much detail as possible the regular routines of the families they were working with.

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Appendix B: Partial Listing of Symposia, Colloquia, Workshops and Articles Making Direct Use of the Findings of This Research

Although care was taken to make sure that a sample of children technically defined as educationally "at risk" were involved in the investigation, the children themselves were not the subjects of the study. (To speak of subjects in an ethnographic investigation makes little sense. Participants, as the reports of Robinson and Brown illustrate, are partners or collaborators in the process of reaching understanding.) The focus was the wider context of the children's daily lives, particularly their families and, in the cases of Gilmore and Schieffelin, their peer associations.

Furthermore, in keeping with the requirements of ethnography, each researcher was left free to develop his or her own style of interaction, of data recording and storage. Each week throughout the year the research team met to share experiences, including both problems and findings. During the latter part of the study researchers from the University City Science Center, who were investigating writing in the out-of-school lives of high school students, joined these meetings. About the same time Weinstein, as part of a seminar she was taking with me, joined the group to share ther experiences in working with Southeast Asian families from the community.

From time to time other scholars joined us and on one occasion the entire team joined with a research team from Harvard (directed by Catherine Snow) and the University of Pennsylvana Moroccan Literacy team (directed by Daniel Wagner) in a weekend seminar. Finally, various members of the research team presented preliminary results of their research at a number of colloquia and symposia. In several cases data from the research were incorporated into published articles and two of the researchers used their data for doctoral dissertations. (A more complete list of these activities is found in Appendix B.)

## OVERVIEW

The result of these efforts is the set of portraits presented in this report. While they differ greatly in format and in focus, each of them constitutes a case study in some aspect of the culture of literacy. As such, this report differs from those presenting similar research. It differs both in the perspective from which the case studies are presented and in the kinds of picture they portray. Each of these differences requires comment.

### A Culture of Literacy Perspective

Concomitant with the easy and intimate relationship that existed between the research team and the community, the style of investigation contributed to the unusual perspective reflected in these studies. The researchers did not establish a research schedule but negotiated a series of contacts based on the mutual obligations of friendship as much as of research imperative. Visits were either by special invitation--for dinner, to tutor, to go to church, etc.--or by standing invitation--"just feel free to drop in this weekend". The latter arrangements, of course, can only exist in the context of a clear and profound understanding of the cultural constraints on social interaction.

These arrangements further imply a relationship of personal respect and social equality between participants. The difficult to erase line seperating researcher and researched all but disappeared as the project went on. The accounts included here are replete with examples of both the investigator and family members asking the other for advice, for help or simply for affirmation. The mother Davis was working with had stood up at the latter's wedding just prior to the start of the study. Watkins tutored one of the boys who was diagnosed as having some reading difficulty and conducted a strike school for the other family. Gilmore had Robinson come to talk with her class and several of her (Gilmore's) students volunteered to work with kids in the school community during the teachers' strike. The school, Shortridge, invited Gilmore's son to make presentations at assembly and at a special African day. The Gilmore and Robinson families socialized together at family and research team outings. Under no conditions did the researchers invite themselves, either overtly or otherwise, into the homes but waited until invitations were offered

So careful were we not to violate personal sensitivities, even at the risk of "losing" data, that we only discovered by accident, after the project was officially terminated, that one of the families was on welfare. The researcher respected the parents' right to keep the information private. The pay off for this care and respect is obvious in the accounts by the researchers.

In summary, this approach is consistant with the kind of ethnography discussed by McDermott (1982) in describing the ethnographic contributions of Charles Frake. McDermott claims that Frake's model sees the particular research method, as well as the questions to be answered, as arising from the research setting. One goes into a site to discover what and how issues are of interest to participants. In the case of the present study, while reading and writing are topics of interest to participating families, this interest is embedded in a very intricate cultural context. Any understanding of the meaning of literacy related activities to the lives of people must start with an explication of this context.

We are, of course, referring to the need to describe the culture of literacy of a particular setting. One can no more understand a literacy act in isolation than a speech act uprooted from its social setting. Furthermore, it makes little ethnographic sense to speak of the social or cultural dimensions of literacy as though literacy activities had an existence apart form that defined by the culture.

While we can make no claims to approaching an exhaustive description of the culture of literacy characteristic of these families, we have been able to describe important aspects of what Goodenough refers to as the theory of cultural behavior imputed to behavior. (Goodenough, 1977). Of particular significance are the different ways families organize themselves to accomplish their everyday routines. These organizations reflect a variety of arrangements designed to exploit a variety of resources in the support of surprisingly (to us) well-defined goals for their children. They also reflect a consistantly articulated set of values with respect to education and schooling in particular, and on the meaning of life in general.

Literacy emerges as an important and natural consequence of the playing out in particular life contexts ot this coherent underlying plan of action. Reading and writing, although playing major roles in the lives of each of these families as instrumentalities, as resources for personal growth and career advancement and, in many cases, as the glue that cements the whole, are seldom seen as worthy of explicit comment or attention. To have asked about them specifically, therefore, would have risked, by the act, skewing the perspective. The one exception is found in the context of concern to meet explicit school expectations. Few of the participants saw themselves as either avid readers or habitual writers. Declared non-readers, without exception, when shown that they in fact did read a good deal, admitted that they were referring to specifically assigned school work or to "long" books reminiscent of school associated reading.

The discovery of these "family cultures" in which literacy plays so central and natural a role, contrasts sharply with the pictures painted for us by school administrators and teachers. In their imputed biographies television was seen as of central importance in the home, reigning as chief source of information and amusement, even serving frequently as babysitter and with literacy activities relegated to minor roles relative to oralcy. The realization that so much of what transpires in the schools is the result of teaching to myth gives poignant cogency to the universal concern of parents in our study that teachers and parents are seriously out of step with each other. While the concerns were usually expressed as frustrations over conflicting teaching styles (the parents using one and the teachers another) the issues, often unrealized by either party, appear to go much deeper.

Both teachers and parents evidence serious misconceptions as to the roles literacy plays and to its meanings and functions in the sphere of the other. The misunderstandings are particularly tragic in that the conflict frequently appears to be more perceptual than real. To put the issue in its simplest terms, our exploration suggests that the routine lives of these families are much more of what teachers would like to have them be than the latter suspect. At the same time the parents live in constant fear that they are not doing all that is expected of them.

Both this rich framing of literacy and the explantation for the discrepancy between school notions and the more complex reality are direct concomitants of the culture of literacy perspective developed and reflected in these reports. We went in asking about reading and writing. We discovered that folks wanted to talk about a number of other issues and in listening we found ourselves informed, not only about literacy, but about a host of other realities that give meaning to the literacy activities we observed.

Before moving on to a brief overview of the portraits themselves, one other aspect of the research perspective employed here needs mention. While the focus of this study was upon a half dozen Black families, Schieffelin, as one of the project researchers, and Weinstein, as an adjunct to the study, looked at literacy use among relatively recently arrived Southeast Asians. As a result we were able to bring a kind of cross cultural lens to the study that is not usually available. Throughout the weekly seminars, when we discussed the ongoing investigation and wrestled with the issues, their insights proved invaluable to our evolving understanding.

In particular, Weinstein's experience was able to help us sort out some of the subtle functions literacy performs--articulation of new social arrangements and cultural brokerage, for example--while Schieffelin's families displayed a set of support mechanisms useful in promoting the development of literacy skills that helped us understand the role of the extended family networks for all of the families. The effects of this component of the study, while very important to the shape of the final reports, are more implicit here than overt.

To summarize, three aspects of the perspective reflected in these reports are notable. First, literacy is presented in a cultural perspective. We do not focus upon literacy events or literacy activities and then trace their social or cultural dimensions. We focus upon the social arrangements and situate the forms, uses and functions of literacy within them.

Second, the perspective here deliberately addresses the issue of institutional versus personal identities. We did not go to the researched with the typical assumption that "there are a number of things we need to know", the we presumably being representatives of the institutions "responsible" for understanding and for providing adequate educational opportunities for an "at risk" population and the things needed to know presumably being information needed to make those institutions work better. Our approach was rather, "what would you like to tell us?" and "what would you like to know about us?" The you in this case being Mr. and Mrs. Drake et. al., not you the parents of a family of "at risk" children. The us, here were (1) a group of researchers from the University, (2) the educational system, and (3) The National Institute of Education--all three identities reflecting associations with institutions not readily accessible of understanding by the "Drakes".

The point being, that while we unavoidably served as institutional represetatives, we did not insist upon a parallel (and, largely imputed) represntativeness on the part of the residents of the school communities as a condition for establishing the legitimacy of their concerns. They were worthy of being heard not because they were defined as the researched, and ultimately, because they were representative of a researchable population, but because they were individuals coping with the demands of subsistence and for providing for their families. (This issue is treated in more detail in another section of the report.)

Third, we were able to contrast, in our deliberations, the experiences of a number of Southeast Asian families with those of the Black participants.

## The Portraits of Literacy in Context

With the exception of the Schieffelin and Weinstein pieces, the following reports all describe inner city Black families. All of the families are poor. Some are on welfare. One lives in a city housing development. Some of the students were good in school others were not.

If the background weren't known it would be hard for a reader to distinguish these families from suburban or white working class families most of us are probably more familiar with. It is impossible to characterize these families in a paragraph because in many ways they differ greatly one form another--in styles of interaction, in daily routines, in values on independence and supervision of children, in active involvement with schools and the education of children, in dreams and goals for their children.

All of the families are concerned that their children succeed in school but not at any cost. All of them want to help their children with homework and with soical adjustment to school demands but they make use of different sets of resources and different styles in organizing this support. Although few individuals see themselves as "readers" or "writers", reading and writing are important activities embedded in the daily routines of family life for everyone. All of the families were keenly aware of their Blackness and of the effects this had on their social movement but none of them appeared willing to sacrifice it for promises of success or to use it, or to let their children use it, as an excuse for not trying.

If themes can characterize these pictures they are: (1) the care with which the families organize themselves to make full use of the resources they have to meet the demands of school and the workplace while living lives of dignity and happiness, and (2) the fear that they may not be doing everything they should or could be. This latter concern helps explain the eagerness with which they welcomed our study. They saw participation as an occasion both to affirm and to inform their efforts to help their children. These portraits are not "typical" pictures of inner city family disintegration or hopelessness.

To backdrop several of the essential features of the protraits we have drawn in this study, I will very briefly draw attention to three recent published research efforts dealing with literacy outside of school. These are, the Heath study of white and Black blue collar families in the Carolinas (1981), the McDermott and Morrison report on Irish American families in New York City (1982) and Ogbu's paper on literacy in subordinate cultures (1981). These reports each add importantly to the research community's understanding of the role literacy plays in the lives of non-mainstream families and complement the picture presented in this report. It is precisely this complementarity that serves to highlight our findings.

Heath's Carolina Study. The Heath research is particularly significant to understanding the present study. Not only did the general hypotheses and several of the research constructs used here (especially the notion of "literacy event") have their roots in her research, but she co-authered with me the original proposal of which the one guiding this research is an ammended version. In a real sense this study was designed to test and to refine several of her earlier findings. Her study looked at the early acquisition of literacy with a focus upon skill acquisition seen in comparing the different ways families interact with literature--and by extension the way they use stories in general--in informal teaching and learning. She compared these processes with those described in school-oriented families and with school pedagogy.

A great deal of attention was given to patterns of questioning, to interactions with literacy artifacts, the types of drawings found in literature, the role of children as information givers in reporting what they read, concerns for truth-value in stories and degrees of decontextualization of literacy activities. She reported clearly different patterns in the Black and white populations. Furthermore, she maintained that both sets of patterns, for different reasons, serve to disadvantage children in school.

As an initial approach we planned to have our site researchers look at the same phenomena in West Philadelphia and formulated a set of tentative research questions around them. It, however, became quickly apparent that many of these phenomena were not the important ones to focus upon in understanding the complex uses and functions of literacy in these homes. Also, several of her findings seemed to be missing in our own research. Although a number of examples are embedded in the case studies, several are offered here.

With respect to pointing out labels or names to children, which Heath found her Black (Trackton) families didn't do, we have seen this almost routinely done. Much of this informal teaching activitiy, however, was done by older siblings or members of the extended family (cousins, aunts, god-parents) which serves a strong support function in all of the families. The same holds for story reading. Older siblings frequently read to their younger brothers or sisters and then engage them in discussions about the stories. Several of the older children have reported that their mothers read to them when they were small.

One intriguing finding reported by Heath was that Black children had touble interpreting or relating to two dimensional line drawings. They needed photographs which were detailed and presented a perception of depth. We found no evidence of this and in discussing the possibility with families in our project encountered a great deal of scepticism about it ever being the case. The possibility must be entertained that the difference lies in the differing approaches taken by the two sets of researchers. Focussing specifically upon literacy events at the relative exclusion of other interactions, in a large number of families would probably not result in one seeing many occasions where simple line drawings were routinely used.

This, however, could be as much a function of the materials available and the specific didactic functions of the events themselves as of ability or preference. When viewed embedded in the life contexts of families and compared with the occasions where three dimensional representations were used, no obvious patterns emerge. All of the families we worked with had access to a variety of literacy materials--in many cases supplied either through sale or loan by the schools--and these materials contained a number of both types of illustration. Neither seemed to present problems to the youngsters.

These examples are presented, not because they are particularly significant in themselves, but as illustrations of the differences between the picture of literacy use and function presented here and that in the study that helped shape it. What appear to be patterns related to developmental processes or to personal preference uncovered in looking specifically at literacy events across a large number of settings, may well take on different meanings when examined from a culture of literacy perspective.

In summary, as a result of the perspective discussed above, the research reported here, in contrast to he Heath study (and others, eg. Michaels, 1981; Gumperz, 1981; Ninio and Bruner, 1978) does not present a set of patterns that characterize the community or the families and which can be generalized to other settings or be directly incorporated into pedagoties. Its usefulness lies in going beyond patterns, to pointing out some of the reasons behind apparent patterns of behavior.

Ogbu's Literacy and Subordinate Cultures. Heath's characterization of Trackton families squares remarkably with the Ogbu notion that lack of literacy success among Black kids he has studied can be traced to the fact that the realities they experience bely the proises of the schools. Their experiences tell them, and accurately so, that school success will have little do to with success in their lives. They occupy a de facto caste with an advancement ceiling that can not automatically be breached by becoming literate. As a consequence, they develop styles of adapting, including enculturative patterns, that are little determined by the demands of school success.

New York City Irish Americans. Both Ogbu's "subordinate culture families" and Heath's Trackton families contrast sharply with the picture presented by McDermott and Morrison when describing the interactions with literacy observed in the Irish American families in New York. These families, whose kids, at great financial sacrifice, were enrolled in parochial schools, to a large extent organized their literacy lives around the perceived demands of schools. In fact, so seriously were the school demands taken that the authors relate one incident where the parent forced her child to do exercises that she thought were conterproductive simply because the school required it.

West Philadelphia Families. At first blush our families appeared to strongly resemble the New York City case. Halfway through the research I was so convinced of this that in an article I developed a culture of literacy typology and placed the Shortridge school community's culture of literacy in the same category as the McDermott and Morrison community. Further reflection and analysis suggests that this is a serious oversimplification. While school demands and expectations are a matter of serious soncern to the families in our study, unlike the apparent situation with Heath and Ogbu's Black families, these are only one of a number of sets of factors that shape the uses and functions of literacy.

The families in our study are greatly concerned that their children not only do well in school but that as a result they have the options to attend the "best" post elementary schools in the city. Few of them (if any) have the resources to send their children to private of parochial schools. furthermore, the schools the children do attend, as is commonly the case, hold out the possibility of acquiring literacy skills as a commodity to be negotiated for. That is, either explicitly or implicitly, they let parents and children know that the offer to teach the skills for success is contingent upon their cooperation. The school will let parents and children know what is expected with respect to deportment, homework and discipline.

Despite this stance and the importance attached to succeeding, none of the families saw the demands as undoable or as non-negotiable. The typical posture was, "we will do everything we can to meet the school's demands. However, we will not sacrifice those things that give meaning and dignity to us. School success isn't the only thing important for our children to experience."

# ISSUES RAISED IN EXPLORING THE CULTURE OF LITERACY

David M. Smith

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# ISSUES RAISED IN EXPLORING THE CULTURE OF LITERACY

## INTRODCUTION

As is always the case with ethnographic research, in trying to pull together the major results we are confronted with more questions than we began with. Ethnography, with its essentially inductive posture, finds itself confronted with an ever expanding universe of concern. A final report is never a finished product but a discussion of issues encountered at the time of writing including a seductive set of leads one would like to pursue.

The present document is no exception. To make sense of the welter of discoveries and unexpected questions we have gathered, I first discuss three general interpenetrating themes that have emerged from the study and follow this by short discussions of a number of more specific findings. The themes, which give shape to and frame the succeeding findings are: (1) the use of the culture of literacy as an heuristic, (2) the tension between institutional and personal identities, and (3) the importance of getting beyond patterns and stereotypes.

## MAJOR RESEARCH THEMES

### The Culture of Literacy Heuristic

If there is one thing that distinguishes the research presented here from the spate of "naturalistic" or "qualitative" descriptive studies on literacy in the past few years, it is the explicit recognition that an individual's literacy related behaviors can only be adequately accounted for with a profound understanding of the larger cultural context. This context includes a set of implicit values on literacy and various literacy behaviors, a set of statuses located in the family and community at least partially defined and articulated by appropriate (or inappropriate) literacy related behaviors, a language of literacy (a way of talking about reading and writing) and even a technology of literacy including a set of skills and techniques for interacting with written materials.

A foundational goal of our research was to describe as accurately as possible this cultural context. Much of this context, the values and social statuses, for example, is implicit--that is, not found in the conscious awareness of individuals. Uncovering it, therefore, requires careful attention to surface behaviors and real participation in the literacy lives of the families and communities. As pointed out earlier, several models of researcher-participant relationships were utilised in collecting the data, including incorporating informants into the research team. (A fuller discussion of this issue was presented in an essay included in the final report of Hymes' Ethnograph Monitoring Project; Smith, David M., "Ethnographic Monitoring: A way to Understanding By Those Who Are Making Schooling Work." 1981, reprinted in The Generator, Spring 1982.)

Describing the context is only one task imposed by a culture of literacy approach. As with any aspect of culture, such a perspective assumes that the cultural mechanism described is part of the total adaptive strategy and that the literacy behaviors it generates can be seen to perform important uses and functions for the individual and the community. By definition these uses and functions will vary from setting to setting. The useses will depend, upon, among other things, how an individual sees him or herself, the particular set of skills he/she has acquired, the literacy materials he/she has access to and what he/she values.

A simple contrasting example is afforded in our case studies. Weinstein reports the case where one of the Asians who arrived earlier than most of the refugee community is able to make use of her superior literacy skills to enrich herself by creating a culture-broker role. One of the Black parents who has a college education, has served as an aide in Shortridge school and is well connected politically, fills a key role in the support network parents and children depend on in meeting school demands. She appears tireless in using her literacy skills for, what she perceives to be, the educational well-being of the community as a whole, including her own children.

The functions of literacy—the social effects of literacy related behaviors—depend importantly upon the particular social arrangements of the community and also upon the wider context. Again several contrastive examples are provided in the case studies. For example, a homework assignment in the private school Gilmore alludes to (not technically part of this research project) may well result in the student going home and, in this own room working out the problem making uses of his own resources. He can afford to do this not simply because he has access to more resources but because he knows that an incomplete or erroneous answer will not reflect badly upon him or his family. A similar example given to one of the boys in the families we worked with would result in his consulting whith his parents and possibly, either through his mother or on his own, with other parents or students in his support network. The assignment becomes a vehicle for articulating, on the one hand, the cohesiveness of the community network and, on the other hand, the boundaries between it and the wider society. A third contrast is offered by the Schieffelin study. An assignment given to an Asian student might well result in him or her going to one of the white friends readily available to give help or even in a phone call to the teacher. The net effect would be a heightening of the perception that the Asians have initiative and are anxious to integrate themselves into the mainstream.

While the major objectives of literacy research using a culture of literacy construct are the explication of the cultural context and a specification of the uses and functions of literacy related behaviors, two crucial concomitants of this approach are less visible. Both are rooted in the particular view of culture brough to this research. They are: (1) the construct nature of culture and, (2) the organic model of social organization it postulates.

Culture as a construct. It is popular to view culture as a "thing" that is located in a particular setting and that can be discovered by careful techniques of participant observation. This notion leads to research that attempts to define culture types on the basis of behavior patterns obtaining across a variety of settings and is behind such generalizations as "Black," "oral," "literate" or "mainstream" culture. While the generation of a typology of cultures might be a legitimate concern of ethnology (although a more cautious and traditional approach confines comparisons to culture traits, at least, as a first step) in educational research, dominated as it is by a psychological perspective, these generalizations have often led to stereotyping and have scarcely aided the goals of equity education. This use of "culture" risks the same limitation of more traditional deductive approaches to educational research, that of overlooking the significant site specific variables that have the greatest explanatory power.

The present research makes no claims to having described a culture. It sees culture as an heuristic of as a theoretical construct that provides a set of categories--values, statuses, technology and language--for organizing data. We make no attempt to locate culture in the collective heads of family or community members. We explicitly recognize that while the adaptive strategy of "the Drakes", for example, contains many features shared by others, the particular social arrangement they participate in, as well as the values they hold, to take just two illustrations, may not be the same for other Black, inner city families.

The organic model of social organization. From the literature and from a familiarity with school practice, it is apparent that the conventional approach to literacy sees it as primarily a set of cognitive skills related to the processing of information. This essential skill view of literacy is reflected in the terminology typically used to describe both of the schools' primary literacy related teaching objectives--the acquisition of literacy skills themselves and the acquisition of skill in using literacy for learning. It is with respect to the latter, enhancing the skills to use literacy for learning, that schools have been the least successful.

One assumption frequently put forth as an explanation for this is that some learners, particularly learners from non-mainstream or oral cultures, make little use of literacy skills outside of school, or at best, use the skills in ways not transferable to school related tasks. This view of literacy and its concomitant assumptions has led to a research strategy suggesting than an explication of these uses would enable schools to develop a pedagogy that could either enrich these uses or that could build curricula upon them. Such thinking has been the impetus behind much ethnographic attention to literacy outside of school.

We would claim, based upon the research reported here, that the uses of literacy outside of school not only are much more extensive than simply as tools for learning (processing information) but, more importantly, are an intrinsic function of the social arrangements characterizing children's lives. More particularly, the uses to which literacy are put depends upon the status an individual fills in a very complex network of relationships that includes his extended family and his peers.

Moreover, this social organization is not mechanistic but organic in nature. That is, each status or role in the arrangement performs a function that is defined by the particular arrangement in totality. From the perspective of the school an individual may be seen as a "child" or as a "learner." In his daily existence, however, he will inevitably play a number of roles that differ from those of his peers or even siblings. The same is true for adults.

By virture of her key role in the church-family-school-community network, Mrs. Drake fills, she will be called upon to use literacy in ways substantially different from those of Mr. Drake. Furthermore, the Drake boys, living in a family where independence is valued, will be called upon to put put their literacy skills to a number of uses that Grace (the sixth grader described by Davis), whose parents feel a real need to buffer their children, will not. Grace, on the other hand, assuming an important care-giver role for her younger sister, puts her skills to use in ways not observed for the Drake boys, in playing school, for example.

Summary. Looking at the role literacy plays in the lives of these families through the culture of literacy heuristic has produced a rich and varied set of protraits that: (1) details the cultural context of literacy related activities, (2) explicates a number of the uses and functions of literacy, (3) does not yield a set of generalizations confirming widely held stereotypes and (4) serves to relate the uses of literacy to particular social arrangements and sets of values.

## Institutional, Social Group and Personal Identities[1]

In shifting our research focus to the community and to families we knew we would be facing some major issues. We were aware, for example, of the sensitivities Black families feel to the presence of researchers representing the official establishment and of the silliness of attempting to do ethnographic research "by appointment" -- having part time researchers collect data by dropping in occasionally or by following an observation-interview schedule. Long discussions among members of the research team were devoted to overcoming these problems.

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[1] While writing this a paper by the Scollons reporting a similar issue in Alaskan native and non-native relationships came across my desk. They suggest that "talking of language as a social poblem may in itself constitute a social problem in that it does not address the prior issue of the nature of language itself." One could substitute "literacy" for "language" and frame a major issue in literacy research among minorities. Their arguments helped me sort out my thinking presented here. I gladly acknowledge my debt. (Scollon and Scollon, 1982.)

We assumed that the long standing relationships we had established with the schools and the school communities and the fact that two of the four site researchers were Black would go far in solving these problems. However, it turned out that the very closeness of the relationship and the ethnic identities of the researchers raised issues themselves. Gilmore poignantly describes the dilemmas she faced in her methodological section. Both Watkins and Davis, the two Black researchers, were faced with equally pressing ethical decisions in the initial stages of their own research.

As a research team we were mandated by the terms of our proposal to collect information on the roles literacy plays in the lives of "educationally at risk" children. Furthermore, as a team we had established a relationship of trust, and in many cases of friendship, with the principals, with teachers and with a number of families in the research communities. Although during our previous studies we had often discussed the ethical problems inherent in doing ethnographic research and had attempted to make sure that we did not violate the trust of participants in the study -- mostly by masking identities of informants and of schools -- we had never squarely faced the issue of the right to collect and to analyze information. It was, as is normally the case, simply assumed that in order to provide good educational experiences "we need to know more about the home lives of 'at risk' children."

As reasonable as this research mandate appears, in it are several assumptions that become problemmatical in doing the kind of research we proposed. Leaving aside for a moment the educational research obsession for finding generalized patterns, the first is that this approach to research sees the world as consisting of two parties, the researcher and the researched. Moreover, the rights of each, the researcher to be getting information, and the researched to be studied, rests upon their group identities.

In the researcher case the identities is usually an institutional one and legitimacy is conferred by a complex set of factors including his professional affiliations, his funding source and simply because he is being paid for what he does. For the researched legitimacy as a source of data is conferred by social group membership, because he or she is an ethnic minority, is poor or a member of a social class. It is recognized, of course, that not everyone qualifies as a typical spokesperson for the group and great care is taken to assure the representativeness of the population by the sample that is studied. Potential research subjects who are not seen as representative cannot serve as legitimate spokespersons.

A second assumption implicit in the "need to know" justification for research is that ultimately the definition of useful information rests with the researcher. There is little room for the researched to decide what he or she would like to have the "man" hear and even less concern for what the researched might like to know from the researcher. While care may be taken to couch research questions in ways that will respect the known sensitivities of the researched, this care is typically motivated only by a concern not to impede the flow of information.

Some of the results of these assumptions are obvious. They do insure the identification of patterns that characterize the researched populations. while they may uncover new characteristics or refine understandings of those already known about the populations being studied, they also serve to confirm the reality of the social groupings originally posited. Other results are not as obvious. For example, the meaning of behaviors, even those that are observed as repeated and patterned, to the actors themselves is seldom a real concern and is even less frequently uncovered. Of even more importance perhaps, is the inability of this approach to know whether the information gleaned from the research effort is really the significant data for explaining what is going on. For instance, while it may be true that most of the children in blue collar Black families tend not to carry on topic centered discourses, such a discovery does not indicate whether this is the most significant reason among others for their not doing well in school. Other things being equal this might turn out not to be a serious problem for them. Furthermore, just knowing they do this doesn't give us any information as to what it might cost them (socially or psychologically) to change their discourse patterns.

More to the point of the issue we raised in the beginning of this section, the assumptions underlying the "we need to know" rationale for research, run counter to the assumptions of the kind of ethnography we attempted. In the first instance, we did not want to decide a priori who were the legitimate sources of information we were seeking. Indeed, we did not wish to decide ahead of time what would count as significant information. We did not even want to assume that we knew what the important social groupings were in these communities.

Moreover, we were depending upon the relationships of trust, of friendship and of collegiality we had already developed for gaining insight. These relationships carry obligations to mutually respect boundaries as well as the other party's control of information and seriously to attend to the wishes or concerns of the other. Simply wanting to know something, no matter how laudable the end to which the information will be put, is not enough. Consequently we assumed the research stance alluded to earlier. Rather than starting with the assumption that "we need to know about literacy use by you, 'at risk' learners," we asked, "what would you like to tell us about literacy use?" and "what would you like to know from us?"

The results are worth noting. First, we found that both teachers and parents accurately understood the mandates we were laboring under, that we had to get information and that we needed to spend time in homes. Out of their own sense of friendship they sought to make it possible for us to meet these requirements. Second, we discovered that they were profoundly aware of the picture that is traditionally presented in the research literature of inner city schools and ghetto communities. They saw these as grossly inaccurate and specifically asked that we not add to the problem. (See Gilmore for a discussion of this in detail.) Finally, they opened their homes and their lives to us so that we could get the pictures presented in the accompanying reports.

Perhaps a much more important and unexpected result was the understanding that in many ways the "literacy problem" of Black inner city children is one of seeing it as a problem. Reminiscent of the Scollon contention about the Alaskan language problem, much of the concern with literacy results from our not being cognizant of the fundamental nature of literacy. So long as we continue to only conceptualize literacy as a set of congnitive tasks we very likely will not uncover or address the reasons why its acquisition and use becomes a problem for minorities.

From the standpoint of the families we worked with it is very much a social reality. Literacy activities, embedded as they are in the daily routines, play important roles in adapting to inner-city existence, in ordering social lives and in decisions that must be made daily in deploying limited resources. Decisions made in responding to school dedemands for acquiring or using literacy depend foremost upon weighing relative advantages and disadvantages in a complex web of competing concerns--How will I, or my children be viewed? How much time will it take? How will it affect their self concept? How will it affect their future successes? How vulnerable will it make them? etc.

From this perspective patterns of literacy use do not neatly define ethnic or social group membership. They rather reflect rational, and specifiable, responses to the demands of living meaningful existences in a particular social setting.

## Beyond Patterns and Stereotypes

The final theme emerging from this research is largely anticipated already. As mentioned earlier, the strength of the portraits presented here does not rest in the expplication of individual patterns of literacy use characteristic of particular populations. Their contributions are in the detailed contexts of literacy use they provide and ultimately the evidence that any observable patterns not only have their roots in a complex reality but, inevitably, are designed to meet real individual or social needs. This, of course, holds immense practical implications. If observed patterns in a learner or a group of learners proves detrimental to attaining educational goals, they can only be successfully addressed within an understanding of what the particular behaviors are doing for the child in his wider life context.

This fact raises serious concern about much ethnographic attention to education that has purported to discover patterns of behavior even when these discoveries might represent new information to educators. Such information is not per se adequate for formulating pedagogical strategy and risks trivializing the inherent value of ethnnography.

A search for patterns is basic to anthropological research. However, for the most part, this search has been a larger process designed to get at underlying cultural themes (ethos) or basic patterns of social organization. Getting this deep structure permits the true comarison of cultural traits. Making a search for patterns the goal of research, as is frequently the case in educational ethnography, constitutes a misapplication of the ethnographic perspective and leads to the confirming of stereotypes. My suspicion is that this particular twisting of ethnography finds its roots in our attempts to adapt the approach to the requirements of educational research, itself rooted in psychology, that legitimates conclusions by their degree of generalizability. Ethnography, of the kind reported here, takes observed patterns, no matter how surprising or routine they may be, as a starting place, not the end.

An inevitable result of such an effort will be the weakening of stereotypes, again as evidenced by the portraits presented here. One interesting sidelight of our study is a rather unexpected insight into the roles stereotyping can play. We were not surprised to find that some educational practice was designed to address what turned out to be myth based upon stereotype. We were not quite ready to find, however, that some of the responses of the Black community was equally structured by its stereotypes of whites.

In discussiong uses and control of television one of the Black parents expressed surprise upon finding that the white researcher admitted that she was more lax in controlling her son's viewing behavior and was equally worried about the effects this had on him and about the way it would cause her to be perceived as a "good" mother. In talking about home school interactions, the Black mother indicated that she had been led to believe that white parents turned out in much greator numbers than do Black ones and was surprised to learn that the white parents suffer the same fears and frustrations in dealing with the schools as she did. The same sort of misconception surfaced with respect to the amounts of reading and of reading materials found in white homes and concerning expectations white parents hold for their children.

While the effects of this mutual stereotyping is not totally clear, we found that it was not unusual for school people to, either consciously or unknowingly, hold up stereotypical ideal notions of what the white world is like in their attempts to motivate Black children. By the same token Black parents and children sometimes either mask or hypercorrect behaviors in response to stereotypically based white expectations.

## LITERACY RELATED FINDINGS

### Introduction

The case studies stand on their own merits and pretty much speak for themselves. In reading them, however, in light of the seminar discussions and with the aid of the notes of team interactions, several issues emerge and merge that hold implications for any deeper understanding of the uses and functions of literacy in these communities. The remainder of this essay discusses these.

### The Literacy Climate

By design we were only looking at families with young children in school. Our acquaintance with the literature and with school characterizations of the role reading and writing played in these families would have predisposed us to expect a primary dependence upon oral modes of interaction. We did expect literacy would play and important role but that it would be largely uncounscious and implicit, that we would have to dig, to listen and to observe closely to find how important it really was.

By contrast we found that reading and writing were major and explicit concerns in each of the families. This attention took many forms. Parents were strict in controlling television and play behavior of their children. Parents were careful to make sure the youngsters completed their homework assignments. Older siblings were encouraged to "teach" younger brothers and sisters how to read and write. Careful attention was given to grades and other indicators of good standing in school. Most of the families attended church and the children were encouraged to do their Sunday School lessons and to participate in memorization and other contests.

In discussions parents were eager to talk about their philosophies of child raising and to mine the researchers as sources of insight as to how they could best see that their children developed good learning and study habits. This was part of a wider, general concern about parenting reflected in their own reading and other self-enrichment activities. Children were encouraged to buy reading material and to take advantage of opportunities offered by the school to acquire books.

While attention to literacy was ubiquitous, explicit and conscious, the climate created was uneasy. Parents and children operated with a general fear that they were not quite doing things right or that they were not doing all that they could and should do. There was concern that they weren't reading enouth, that they might not be reading the "right" things, that the styles of teaching or interacting weren't entirely appropriate but that, given the constraints of poverty and their own limited exlperience in the "literate world", this was they best they knew how to do. As Gilmore points out, this fear is not limited to families but is reflected in teacher attitudes as well and ultimately seems to be based in the underlying premise that children represent potential failures.

Literacy Environments

Administrators and teachers in all three of the school communities where we worked stress the importance of families providing a literate environment for their children. In the homes of all of the Black families reading materials were much in evidence and discussion indicated that a good amount of reading was done. While most of the parents claimed that their reading and writing was pretty much restricted to job related requirements (only one admitted to being a "voracious reader"), virtually all of them did read the newspapers and at least regularly perused a number of periodicals.

Children were routinely given chores to do that required reading and writing. Church activities took literacy skills for granted, not only in the use of hymnbooks and the Bible during worship, but in the Sunday School lesson assignments and other youth activities. In order to carefully shepherd their meager resources parents typically kept careful records so that they could plan expenditures and family activities in advance.

The practices of schools to enrich the literate environments of families turns out to have some unexpected consequences. Making commercially produced reading material available to children through inexpensive club buying plans results in the acquisition of materials that are not necessarily appropriate to the reading interests of the children. They may feel great social pressure to buy either to keep up with their peers or because of the advertising pressure of the company.

Another unexpected effect of school practice on book acquisition was uncovered in discussion with one of the mothers who sells encylcopedias on the side. She found virtually no market amont the families whose children attended Shortridge when she tried to argue that they would be aids to the children's homework. Parents responded that the home work assignments consisted of skill practice and seldom, if ever, of work that required the use of a reference text.

Our study would suggest that the significance of literacy materials in the home rests not in the number of artifacts but in their appropriateness to the interests and needs of the family. Furthermore, when they are appropriate they will be used routinely and naturally in ways not always thought about by family members themselves.

## Family Organization

We were surprised at the care with which several of the families in our study organized themselves to make the most of their time and resources. In some cases menus were planned and groceries bought a month ahead of time. Virtually all of the families established daily routines to which the adults and children were all expected to adhere. This careful organization was related to the need to carefully count the costs of any major decisions.

The organization extended beyond the uses of material resources and time and importantly affected literacy related activities. This is seen in the concern of Grace and Marian's mother that the children play school experiences are structured to ensure some sense of success, in another mother's confession that she regularly reads her daughter's private diary to make sure "she is feeling good abour herself" and in the Drakes' concern that children don't see reading and writing as simply work. We found impressive amount of time and energy devoted to carefully structuring the activities of families to achieve a careful balance between requirements for success and making sure not too high a cost is paid.

## Support Networks

Examination of the organizational structure of families, and particularly the functioning of this organization in meeting school demands leads to the discovery of intricate support systems that include extended family members, frequently the church and sometimes even the local political system. It is not unusual for aunts or uncles and other family friends to be consulted for help in doing homework assignments or to give advice in making school related decisions. School successes, awards for perfect attendance, acceptance into a "good" school, admission to the Academics Plus Programs, winning a church contest or an essay contest, are all occasions for extended family and friends to celebrate and to be careful to offer congratulations.[1]

As indicated earlier, this cooperative stance not only contrasts rather sharply with the essentially individual and competitive perception of the proper approach to school common in the white middle class schools we are familiar with, but it generates its own set of problems. First, as Watkins has pointed out on several occasions, both Black parents and white teachers find themselves unclear as to what constitutes "legitimate" support and when the line is crossed to cheating. Dealing, as we are across cultural boundaries, it is not enough to set down simple rules, as for example, "parents should check but not correct homework." Both the definitions of the act of checking and control of the unanticipated side effects of simply checking ("teachers will think we are dumb") became issues.

Secondly, confining support activities to extended family and friends, by contrast with the Asian children who feel free to call upon white acquaintances or upon school personnel for help, risks heightening the perception on the part of the school, that parents and children don't really make full use of the resources that are available to them. Furthermore, from the perspective of the families themselves, this approach little addresses the pervasive fear and suspicion that "we may not be really doing things quite right."

Related to this, Schieffelin has documented a situation where the traditional support roles are apparently reversed. For the Asian children, not only can they not go to their parents and relatives for help with their literacy related tasks since these adult relatives are seldom literate in English, but the parents themselves depend upon the children for support and help. The situation in the Black families is not totally a simple reversal of this. A number of Black parents, as evidenced by their activities in attempting to provide schools for their children during the teacher strike, feel that they are inexpert when it comes to aiding their children. While they are anxious to provide the help that is needed, this frequently takes the form of networking with other resources (an aunt, uncle, someone at church, a family friend) or in buffering and encouraging rather than as direct help with the school mandated literacy tasks.

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[1] These practices are rooted in the southern Black roots of the families where, contrary to popular myth, setting and attaining high educational goals was and is common place.

Unlike the situation reported elsewhere, children in these Black and Asian homes are seen as reliable reporters of literacy mediated information. What they have to say is attended to and their concerns are taken very seriously.

## Homework and the Culture of Literacy

Homework has always been an issue in American public schooling. It has been seen as an informal measure of a school's seriousness about academics and a basis for categorising students--those, for example, who always had their homework done on time and those who "never cracked a book." Researchers, like Heath and McDermott have seen homework as important literacy activities. They become occasions for both analyzing patterns of interaction with text and for revealing social organizations around literacy demands.

In our study homework takes on even added significance. In these homes and communities homework is not presented as an individual contract between the student and his/her teacher (as was the case in my own elementary and high school career) given primarily to enhance or to reinforce skills presented in the classrooms. It is seen, by both the school and the community, as a contract between the school and the family designed to articulate the nature of the parents' relationship and commitment to the school.

From a culture of literacy perspective, therefore, the ways homework is perceived, approached and engaged forcefully illustrate the complex negotiations families find themselves constantly faced with in facilitating the acquisition of literacy skills by the children. A perusal of the case studies reveal a number of facets of this process. We see the considerable support system involving the extended family, church and even the local political organization, brought into play. We see the ambivalences of parents, caught between a sense of their own enexpertness, their sense of responsibility to their children and their suspicions that schools may not always have only the good of the children in mind in formulating their policies and demands. We see the formal and informal channels of communication that exist between school and home as well as the leakages in these channels. We also see parents weighing the costs and benefits resulting from children meeting to the letter the schools perceived expectations in light of desires to have them feel good, have fun and be proud of their parents and their Blackness.

## Home School Relationships

Implicit in most of our discussion is a particular model of home-school relationship important to explaining the roles literacy plays in family lives but which is difficult to capture in a brief description. Understanding it requires the tracing of a number of threads.

First, the school situation in Philadelphia is constructed so that parents, if they have the resources, can choose a number of options for their children--private schools, parochial schools, prestigous and well-reputed public elementary schools and the neighborhood public schools. All of the parents in our families sent their children to the neighborhood public elementary schools, although both of the families Robinson describes had succeeded in getting their older children into one of the high prestige schools with a good academic reputation. None of them felt they could afford any of the other options.

Second, we have to take into account the climate of tentativeness and uneasiness that pervades the community as parents and children work to deal with school expectations. Related to these factors, is the strong feeling that school success is of vital importance to later success in life and even of children feeling good about themselves as students. Every parent was concerned that their children have "good" school experiences in the widest sense of both succeeding academically and socially.

Still another factor important to understanding school-home relationships is the pervasive frustration at the perceived unresponsive central office policies of the school district. This, however, soes not translate into an equal frustration with the local schools. Parents generally saw all three of the schools in the communities under consideration as doing their best to make the most of a very difficult situation. The central office is seen as allocating funds on the basis of politics, of mandating senseless transfers of teachers to insure racial balance, of unwisely closing small schools in the interests of economy, of not keeping schools adequately repaired or secure, of putting teachers in untenable bargaining positions (although teachers were not held blameless for the strike) and generally of not being responsive to the needs or feelings of parents.

As a result of this combination of factors, parents find themselves on the one hand frustrated that schools are not adequately meeting the educational needs of their children, while on the other hand, with respect to most issues, finding it necessary to ally themselves with the local schools in dealing with a common set of problems. A poignant example of this was afforded by the experience at Harriet Tubman school during the strike. Parents, in collusion with the principal and some of the teachers, and in defiance of the union including the serious threat of involvement by the Teamsters, not only kept the school open but kept the news from the media.

This ambivalent relationship is also reflected in a number of incidents we recorded. It goes far to explain why parents go to great pains to understand fully and to cooperate with school requests. In every case where a parent felt strongly that change should be made--whether it was in the removal of a teacher of aide, a change in homework policy, the transfer of a child to another class or school, or a new detention policy--the first step was to try to work with the school directly. Only when this failed did parents resort to other moves, appealing to local political powers, for example.

This ambivalence also helps explain why, parents who were obviously deeply involved in their children's schooling frequently frustrated school officials by not participating as fully as desired in school sponsored activities--open houses, parent teacher conferences, special events--designed to enlist the vissible support of parents. These initiatives were not always seen as insuring support of children but as convenient ways for the schools to appear interested. In fact, on several occasions parents complained that schools expected all of the ititiative for real contact over student needs to be borne by parents. Teachers, for example, were seldon known to visit homes of children.

## The Challenge of the "New Literacies"

Several of the ways in which literacy, when viewed as essentially a social process rather than primarily a cognitive task, affect our understanding of schooling, have been discussed in the appended article. (Smith, 1982). At this point I would like to make just one further observation on the issues.

There is general concern in educational circles that traditional literacy is on the decline in face of the explosion of communication technology. The main expressed concern is with the imformation processing aspects of the new literacy, and for schools, how they can keep up with the advances in technology, promote the literateness of students in the new modes and insure a continuing role for traditional reading and writing. However, research such as ours leads to the suspicion that these stated concerns may mask deeper fears.

It is our contention that the social functions played by the differential aquisitions and uses of literacy skills is of overriding importance in determining and explaining these differences. The way literacy is presented, taught and evaluated has make it one of the most powerful tools for maintaining the social order and controlling access to cultural capital.

The advent of new modes of literacy, computer literacy, for example, and the increasing availibility of new communication technology risks seriously upsetting this carefully crafted structure. Much as history teaches us that acquisition of literacy by a society can prove to be either a pathway to liberation or a tool of suppresion, the risks of the new literacy are that the current status quo will be seriously endangered.

On the other hand, educators who are concerned with providing quality education for all students will need to have a profound understanding of the many uses to which literacy can be put and the far-reaching social effects particular approaches entail. Far from being on the decline, literacy plays vital social roles. Only by being aware of them as they differ from community to community, can the "new literacies" be made tools for the good of society. Only with this understanding can we formulate educational goals and strategies that lead to equity education.

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# LITERACY AND ATTITUDE

Perry Gilmore

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# LITERACY AND ATTITUDE

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to describe the conduct and findings of a study of the uses of literacy skills outside of school for intermediate age children and their families. The research was primarily concerned with understanding the meaning of literacy to the individuals in the study and as a result involved following a group of children and their families and friends in a variety of settings (including such physical settings as church, home, school, and sports events). The nature and uses of literacy are described and analyzed with special focus on the processes, patterns and functions of literacy interactions. How literacy is used, reinforced and transmitted in and out of school contexts were the central questions which guided the data collection.

The research presented herein is based on a three-year literacy study, conducted in a predominantly low-income, Black urban community. The final year of the investigation is of main concern in this report, however, since the findings are integrally related to the first two years of research (also funded by NIE grants to the University of Pennsylvania, see Hymes et al, 1981). Discussion of the relevant earlier findings, and questions those findings raised, will be included for the benefit of the reader.

Before proceeding with the discussion of the study it will be necessary to clarify the researcher's use of several terms which are quite basic to an exploration of the social dimensions of literacy. Anthropologists view education as transmission of culture and schooling as only one aspect of a range of formal and informal learning contexts. The field of ethnography and education has been reflective of its anthropological heritage by frequently being concerned with children in and out of school. Though this concern with children's literacy behavior across contexts is shared by the author, the terms - as simple as they are - can prove misleading. The immediate image which the reader, and unfortunately all too often many researchers conjure, are two contrastive physical settings such as a school classroom and family scene at home. Though these are no doubt representative of in and out of school settings, they are merely physical frameworks and not always acurately reflective of contextual enviroments. Contexts and settings are not necessarily a matter of physical location but can frequently be a matter of situations within a physical setting. In other words, within a classroom where expectations are that a teacher is supervising formal learning activities, often interactions occur within an altogether different frame. Participation structures and roles can vary within the same physical dimensions of the setting creating altogether different kinds of interactions, organized and reorganized for different purposes.

For example, though instructional sequences such as Mehan (1979) depicts, composed of initiation, reply and evaluation segments, do represent the "lesson", it is misleading to assume that such a model comprehensively characterized the general nature of the discourse going on in the class setting. The lesson talk may be indeed foregrounded, but it is certainly not the only talk taking place. Multiple discourse contexts and corresponding participation structures can be identified within the same classroom occurring simultaneously at any given time. Joke telling, teasing, plans for the clubs and social activities, note passing, and the like may be the peer interaction that is foregrounded for a student, with the teacher lesson being only a side focus to be monitored for self protection. It is quite natural to observe "out-of-school" behavior within a physical setting which suggests an "in school" context.

Similarly, when observing literacy "at home" it appears that much at-home time is structured by school culture (i.e., values, language and discourse styles, interactional patterns). Not only do parents follow explicit directions about how to conduct homework sessions during the school year but even summer practice and assignments take up many at-home hours. In search of home literacy patterns it is difficult to sort out distinctly school from community aligned practices (for more detailed discussion of this issue see Gilmore and Smith, 1982).

The present study was sensitive to the limitations and constraints of viewing physical environments as context. Therefore no a priori assumptions were made about the "in" or "out" of school nature of an interaction or behavior as a result of the physical location of an event. Most interesting, in fact, were the opportunities to see the overlap and reciprocal dynamics of community and school aligned practices. It was, in fact, in a school setting that I first encountered "steps", a genre of street rhyme which girls actively participated in outside of school. Diaries, notes, graffitti, written raps and the like, were literacy materials related to out-of-school practices yet regularly observed in use in in-school settings. Further, it was difficult to participate in interactions with parents in the community without being involved in school-related activities. In the particular community in which the study took place the school was a strong social center of activity with home and school association dances, teas, book sales and special programs drawing large community participation on a regular basis.

This approach to the physical and contextual environments of literacy behaviors provided a more comprehensive and complex profile of "out-of-school" literacy skills. Further it allowed for a more integral and meaningful portrait of the uses of literacy for learning across all contexts producing findings which more realistically lead to recommendations for more effective literacy instruction in school.

One further set of assumptions often seems to go along with the literature and research on in and out of school learning and needs brief comment here. Often in search of outside of school literacy practices family instructional or discourse patterns become the central focus of attention. Labelling and questioning patterns in parent/child interactions have been typically examined in home literacy studies (e.g., Ninio and Bruner, 1978; Heath, 1982; Miller, 1979, Scollon and Scollon, 1979). The present study concentrates on intermediate grade students during their fourth, fifth and sixth years of school. The target population in the studies cited above have largely been preschoolers who more routinely are read to or are engaged in more parent-child literacy interactions. The pre-adolescents who were the focus of this study spent many less hours in family interactions centered on literacy activities and many more engaged in peer interactions which were often literacy or literacy-related events. Thus, rather than depicting school and home contrasts or teacher vs. parent styles of interaction with children, peer interactions and peer contexts (whether at home, in school, or in the street) became significant areas of investigation.

The remaining discussion will be divided into two sections. The first section will present conclusions from the first two year study and trace the key findings related to the present study through the third year of research. Particular attention will be paid to two behavioral events, stylized sulking and steps, which provided "windows" through which underlying cultural themes were explored. "Steps" are street rhymes which are viewed here as literacy related speech events that demonstrate numerous literacy and language skills possessed by their performers. The interpretation and treatment of the performance by individual families and the general school community are described and analysed in order to understand more completely issues concerning the meaning of literacy in this setting.

The final section will explore a range of themes and issues raised in out-of-school literacy studies. Methodological, theoretical and practical concerns will be addressed and findings summarized.

## LITERACY SUCCESS AS AN ISSUE OF 'ATTITUDE': THE THREE YEAR STUDY*

School achievement and the acquisition and display of literacy competence are for all practical concerns inseparable. The study described in this section sought to identify and explore school and community perceived problems concerning literacy achievement. The research focus was on cultural patterns of literacy-related social interactions in and out of school. These were examined to ascertain their consequences for the acquisition and display of school-recognized literacy practices. The data were collected in and out of school and consist of personal observations, interactions and interviews documented over a three year period with field notes, audio tape recordings, and collections of relevant "artifacts".

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*A more detailed account of this work is found in Gilmore, 1982, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania.

## Attitudes and Access to Literacy

A major problem identified and voiced repeatedly by teachers (about 50% black and white), parents and administrators and even the children in the community was "attitude". A "good attitude", indeed, seemed to be the central and significant factor for students' general academic success and literacy achievement in school. This concern with "attitude" is by no means unique or restricted to this particular study site. The reader's own experience probably suggests that this concern is a significant issue in most school and work situations. However, in this particular setting, talk about "attitude" was dramatically more prominent than talk about "intelligence". In fact, it was made clear to staff and parents as well as students, that in cases of tracking and/or selection for honors or special academic preference, "attitude" outweighed academic achievement or IQ test performance.

The specific dimensions and features, and actual meanings of "attitude" can of course differ from one setting to another. To document them in this particular setting was one of the goals of the investigation. Some of the questions considered were: What is meant when attitude is referred to or evaluated? What are the characteristics of "good" or "bad" attitudes? Who gets labeled as having a "bad" attitude, a "good" attitude? What are the consequences and/or rewards for the label? Why is attitude so prominent as a theme of success? What are the consequences of this focus?

Conventional dictionary or textbook definitions are of little help in sorting out the particular meanings of attitude to the participants in the setting being studied. Instead the approach taken here was concerned with how attitudes are communicated, understood, and interpreted. An ethnographic approach to the study of attitude considers the functions and uses of the concept as it is constructed in a particular context.

By observing actions and reactions to behaviors seen as related to attitude and by noting the language used to describe or evaluate such behaviors, a profile of the constructed meanings was developed. A picture began to emerge of what linguistic and social behaviors "count" as attitude and of how these behaviors were affected (both in performance and interpretation) by the different contexts in which they occurred. The process of identifying a domain of the concept of attitude required the discovery and description of the related folk categories used by the participants.

A student with a "good attitude" was described in terms like "completing homework," "being cooperative," "no discipline problems," "good attendance," "being punctual,""having involved parents," "good work habits," and the like. The descriptions were extensive and quite varied in terms of the dimensions of behavior they encompassed.

Further, in talking to many of the staff, and in the initial phases of general observation in the school and community, it became apparent that "attitude" was delicately woven into a broader context of what might be labelled "propriety". Proper standards of what is socially acceptable in conduct or speech appeared to be a consistent concern in both the community and the school. On my initial visits to the school the neatness and the well-mannered, orderly behavior of the children in halls, and classrooms were regularly pointed out and emphasized by administrators and staff. The school takes pride in being "well-run" and the parents seem to voice their approval of this image. The school has an excellent reputation among the majority of the community members.

At times in talking about students, other descriptions were offered that seemed related to the use of "good" and "bad" attitude. The label "street kid" or "child of the streets" seemed to be used to describe students who were not neatly groomed, did not have "involved parents," had little supervision at home, were often absent or late, did not complete homeowrk, and the like. These "street" kids were often the same children who were characterized as having "an attitude" or a "slight attitude." (In these cases the use of the term "attitude" alone conveys the notion of a negative or bad attitude). On the other hand, labels like "cultured," "lady-like", "nice kid," "respectful," which seem to imply politeness and propriety, were used synonymously with "good attitude."

A "good attitude" appeared to be central to inclusion in special high track classes referred to as an Academics Plus Program. The Academics Plus Program is described by staff as a rigorous, "back to basics" curriculum in which academic achievement and excellence is the primary goal.

To qualify, a student not only has to be working at a certain grade level, but also to display a "cooperative attitude." The program is in effect a tracking procedure for attitude as well as academic achievement. Teachers sometimes talk about the process as one of "weeding out bad attitudes." A student working at a relatively low grade level might be admitted to the program if his or her behavior indicated a desire to work and be cooperative. In such a case, a "good attitude" outweighs limited academic achievement. In other reported instances, a bright child who might be achieving academically, but whose behavior is characteristic of a "bad attitude," would not be admitted. In such a case, "attitude" again outweighs academic achievement. The staff often express pride and identification when talking about the school and its students, especially the Academics Plus students, referring to "our kids" in a proud and affectionate tone. One teacher, attempting to illustrate the exceptional attitude and repuration of the students asked, "have you seen our sixth grade Academics Plus students? They're cultured. They're not street kids. Have you seen the way they carry themselves?" The reference to the way students "carry themselves" suggests demeanor and propriety. (See Goffman, 1976, on the nature of deference and demeanor).

Less than a third of the population in each intermediate grade level (3-6) was selected for the special academic program. It was clear to the staff, the children and the parents that although the participation in the Academics Plus Program did not guarantee literacy success and general academic achievement, it certainly maximized the chances for it. It created an elite. It stratified the students. It made mothers cry with their children, when they were rejected. And the key factor for admission was something everyone called a "good attitude."

In the case of assessing attitude few would hesitate to question their ability to judge it. Yet try to grasp it for study, to understand its dimensions and it becomes peculiarly abstruse. As with intelligence - we are much more capable of saying whether you have it or not, than of saying what it is you have. Yet based on "attitude" some will be admitted to classroom where literacy skills will be made more available to them, and others will not.

In order to unravel the meaning of attitude in this school community, the study focused on discrete linguistic and social behaviors that shed light on the theoretical questions being investigated. Two key behavioral events emerged as significant in the conduct of the research. These events provided fertile ground for careful analysis of the enactment of attitude. Correspondences and contrasts in the way people talked about attitude and the way people actually behaved with regard to attitude were detailed.

Both behavioral events stood out prominently in the data, almost inviting further attention and analysis. In much the same way they stood out as behaviors that were readily noticed, controversial and problematic for the teachers at school. Both key behaviors were counted as inappropriate. Both were performances that stood out and received attention from the staff and in turn from the community.

## Stylized Sulking

The first key behavioral event is a characteristic response in face-to-face clashes of will between student and teacher. These were conventional displays of emotion that appeared regularly in my field notes and were prominent and noticeable in classroom interactions. These displays of what I have termed stylized sulking* were usually non-verbal and often highly choreographed performances which seemed to in the teachers' words, convey "rebellion," "anger," and a stance of "uncooperativeness." The displays were themselves discrete pieces of behavior which conveyed information. They were dramatic portrayals of an attitude. They were postures that told a story, to the teacher and to onlooking peers. They were face-saving dances. They were regularly interpreted as part of Black communicative repertoire and style. Students who frequently used the displays were also students who were identified as having bad attitudes.

Stylized sulking was performed by both sexes though there was some variation in the style of its performance according to sex. Girls will frequently pose with their chins up, closing their eye lids for elongated periods and casting downward side glances, and often markedly turning their heads sidewards as well as upwards. Girls also will rest their chins on their hand with elbow support on their desks. Striking the pose, or getting into the pose is usually with an abrupt movement that will sometimes be marked with a sound like the elbow striking the desk or a verbal marker like "humpf." It seems necessary to draw some attention to the silence primarily with a flourish of getting into the pose.

Boys usually display somewhat differently. Their "stylized sulking" is usually characterized by head downward, arms crossed at the chest, legs spread wide and usually desk pushed away. Often they will mark the silence by knocking over a chair or pushing loudly on their desk, assuring that others hear and see the performance. Another noticeable characteristic of the boys' performance is that they sit down, deeply slumped in their chairs. This is a clear violation of the constant reminder in classrooms to "sit up" and "sit up tall." Teachers will often talk about "working on" sitting up, feet under the desk, lining up, et al. The silence displays go against all the body idiom rules of the classroom. Even when less extreme postures are taken the facial expression remains an easily read portrait of emotion.

Performances were individual, not group behaviors. Though on occasion one might come upon a situation where a group of students simultaneously were expressing the same sulking bodily configuration and facial expression it would not be a cooperative endeavor, but a coincidence of corresponding emotions. Stylized sulking as a school-related problem seems age related. Though these displays were not performed exclusively by students in the intermediate grades (4-6), they were significantly more prominent then.

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*For detailed discussion of this behavior see "Silence and Sulking: Affect and Literacy Acquisition". Forthcoming in Functions of Silence, D. Tannen and M. Saville-Troike (eds.).

Sulking was primarily performed in a silent channel and an angry key. It seems, in fact, a last holding place to express defiance. For those students who do cross the line, the predictable verbal accompaniment transforms the crime from one of "bad attidude" to one of insolence and insubordination. These latter labels usually are associated with treatments more extreme than low track classes (e.g., suspension, psychological guidance, and the like).

Stylized sulking was usually performed to an authority figure. The individual sulker is subordinate in status to the receiver of the display. Though the display, which is often used as a face-saving device, is certainly meant to be seen by onlooking peers, the primary audience is the adult in control. Sulking generally appeared in settings where an authority figure was in control and usually in direct conflict with the performer. Classrooms, hallways, lunchrooms and the like are predictable settings for this kind of display. Further the behavior appeared more in classes which have not "weeded out bad attitudes." In settings where propriety had been selected for, such as Academics Plus classes, few if any sulking events were observed. Certain agreed upon expectations of attitude and behavior in the Academics Plus classes changed the classroom context in a way that made sulking no longer adaptive. The demeanor was no longer appropriate for the teacher or the peer group in the setting. Though the act of sulking itself was rarely, if ever, mentioned and was almost never cnsciously a part of the assessment of a student's attitude, students who sulked repeatedly, had negative characteristics attributed to them as a result. Stylized sulking was not consciously, but nonetheless, quite effectively selected out, in the process of identifying "good attitudes."

Another concern focuses on how stylized sulking was treated in this community. As mentioned earlier though the entire student population observed was Black, the faculty is both Black and White (50%/50%). The data suggest that there are in general commonly held views about these displays that are different for most Blacks and Whites. The data consisted of views directly expressed about stylized sulking, observations of the ways in which Black and White teachers behaved in response to these displays, and finally comments made by the faculty and parents about the differences they themselves were conscious of concerning the way White teachers and Black teachers generally responded. In general it was felt that White teachers tended to be more "lenient" and "permissive" where this type of communication was concerned.

A Black teacher was more likely to discipline a dramatic sulking display, sending the child to the office, calling the parent, or in some way immediately chastizing the student. Black parents often scolded or threatened to hit children for such displays. In Church and community contexts an "attitude" was quickly conveyed in such displays and children were told to leave or modify their behavior. A White teacher on the other hand might be more likely to ask a child to verbalize his or her feelings as well as directly refer to the feelings the display seemed to communicate (e.g., I can see you're feeling angry). In general, Whites were seen as less likely to discipline these "temper tantrums."

Stylized sulking seemed to be seen as a "cultural" variation of expression and communication. Sulking in the highly stylized way it is performed by many of the students, was viewed by both Black and White teachers as part of a stereotypic communicative style of Blacks. Much the way Jewish or Italian gestural style might by characterized, so too this behavior might easily be interpreted as a Black gestural performance.

Black parents and teachers suggested that White teachers might be more tolerant of such behaviors because they were "intimidated by Black children and their parents." White teachers tend to talk about student "hostility" and the need to be more verbal about feelings. As a result of the controversy over the use of non-standard varieties of English and in the recent concern with bilingual and multicultural education, there has been a growing sensitivity to and awareness of cultural variation in communication. Often by allowing these behaviors, White teachers believe they are expressing acceptance of cultural diversity.

Black teachers and parents frequently express concern that this permissiveness and lenience are signs of "low standards" or of "not caring about" these Black kids and whether they learn the necessary skills, attitudinal and academic, which are seen as prerequisite to success. White teachers, too, express similar concerns about "low standards" often looking to Black teachers for appropriate models for reaction.

Upon closer examination, however, sulking itself is not actually uniformly treated nor uniformly performed. Some children seem to have perfected this type of display routine in a very highly stylized way. In observations of language acquisition in poor White working class families, Peggy Miller (personal communication) found that mothers would tell their babies (under two years old) to make "mean eyes" as part of a communicative routine. In the Black community in which this study is being conducted, expressed norms of appropriate interactional demeanor include "looking ready to fight" (Davis, 1980) and "not taking shit" (May, 1980).

The stylized sulking could be interpreted as one behavioral element of a "tough" demeanor, yet how sulking behavior gets interpreted appears to be highly dependent on contextualization cues. One child's sulk is read as "anger and hostility", while another, appearing to display the same or very similar physical characteristics, is merely "needing attention". Very similar behaviors are interpreted in very different ways. In one case the behavior can be glossed as style and in another case, "bad attitude". In a similar fashion, there are teachers and parents who appear to play with stern face silent stares and looks as a dramatic performance. One student commenting on one such teacher said, "At first I thought she was real mean till I realized she was just foolin' around. She has a good sense of humor." I observed this particular teacher's class on the day when parents were invited to come in and take the place of their children as students for the day. She, in comic fashion, performed both verbal and non-verbal means of parodied strict control. Silent looks of disapproval seemed humorously inappropriate when directed at a class full of adults. Not only was it clear that it was playful, but the parents' cooperative engagement in the game, sanctioned the appropriateness of it in their view as a means of control for their children.

It appears that student sulking can be interpreted positively or negatively depending on when and how the display is performed in a particular context. Certain children can signal the message "this is play" (Bateson, 1972), but for the most part it is a behavior that carries the image of incorrect deference and demeanor and is usually interpreted as indicative of a "bad attitude."

Goffman has commented that "the human use of displays is complicated by the human capacity for reframing behavior" (1976, p. 71). Rituals become ritualized and transformations can be transformed. Performances become styled and coded in distinguishable ways as a result of cultural influences. Hilda Geertz, for example, documents the ways in which a "vocabulary of emotions" comes to be expressed in Balinese society (1975). Not only do cross-cultural examples detail the range of styles for expressing emotions, but considerable ethnic diversity can be observed in our own society. In the recent popular movie, "Four Seasons", one particularly hot-headed and explosive character in stereotypic fashion defended her temper by repeatedly declaring with corresponding gestures, "I'm Italian!" Comedians typically (like the teacher mentioned above) draw their styles and use these displays in parenthesized fashion as a resource for humor. Most pupular for young audiences is actor Gary Coleman's quotable line and memorable posturing of "stylized sulking" on the weekly situation comedy on network television, "Different Strokes". When he says to his big brother "What chu talkin about, Willis" his eyes are narrowed and his demeanor is clearly tough and Black. But the display is contextualized in such a way that it is a parody of being tough and Black. It is rekeyed in such a way that it becomes clearly lighthearted and funny. The same display conveys a quite opposite meaning. Moods as well as ethnic styles are being played with.

Geertz (1973) describes what he calls a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures as he details the subtle yet distinct differences between twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies of winks and rehearsals of parodies of winks. In much the same way this example of stylized sulking can be "unpacked." It can be performed by design for comic effect as well as threatening effect. One of my undergraduate students has recounted stories to me of ways in which she and a friend, the only two Black girls at a private girls' school, used verbal and non-verbal displays associated with "street" behavior of Blacks in order to frighten the white girls. The context of these displays and the ways in which they are framed determined the way they were interpreted. Possibly they sometimes take the form of ethnic "in" jokes, which are understood to be okay when no ethnic outsiders are present.

Knowing cultural diversity exists, what do teachers do about it? On the one hand one risks squelching cultural behaviors because they seem incompatible with success. On the other hand, inappropriate behaviors may go unchallenged because they are seen as cultural. Teasing, humor and affection were effective means used successfully by both Black and White teachers and parents dealing with stylized sulking behavior. By using devices such as these, adults were most often able to stop the sulking while at the same time indicate its inappropriateness.

In addition to expressing emotion, displays provide evidence of an actor's alignment. Sulking displays therefore must also be considered in this latter regard. In general, sulking displays can function as face-saving devices which maintain dignity through individual autonomy when confronted by an authority in control. The display indicates the actor's refusal to align him or herself with the authority figure. The stylized sulking characteristic of Black communicative repertoire seems to be interpreted as a statement of alignment with the student's own ethnicity and socio-economic class. The meanings that are read from such an portrayal of attitude and the consequences for literacy achievement will be considered further in the following discussion.

### "Doin Steps"

The second key behavioral event that was analyzed was performance of a distinctive genre of street rhymes which seems to have grown out of the tradition of drills and cheers. The genre is locally referred to as "steps" (or "doin' steps") and it involves chorally chanted rhymes punctuated with foot steps and hand claps which set up a background rhythm. It is performed by groups of girls and consistent with tradition in children's folklore, it is full of taboo breaking and sexual innuendo in both the verbal and non-verbal modes of its performance. The dances were striking. The chants full of verbal virtuosity. They turned passersby into audiences. They were polished. But they were "nasty." They were seen as defiant. They were seen as part of Black communicative repertoire. They were seen as representing "deteriorating attitudes." And they were banned from the school.

When studying children's peer group culture in different ethnic and racial groups all over the world not only the "playful whimsical and artful aspects" emerge but also the "aggressive, obscene, scatological, anti-authoritarian and inversive elements" (see Bauman, 1982). Peer culture folklore is often representative of counter-culture values. Good (1968) has noted this "gap between the public literate tradition of school and the very different and indeed often directly contradictory private oral traditions of the pupil's family and peer group" (p. 59). Although "steps" demonstrate a wide variety of language competencies in their verbal performances none of these "count" as verbal skill in school contexts. Instead the performance indicated an alignment with peer group culture and was considered inappropriate. By examining the features of this speech event some key issues concerning literacy competence as well as the social meanings of literacy and instruction were detailed.

## Stepping and Spelling Mississippi

One of the stepping street rhymes, "Mississippi", seemed to be not only related to matters of propriety and attitude in general, but to literacy in particular. The group of five girls I was observing sometimes participated in neighborhood competitions. At school and in class the girls practiced together to compete with other classes at school. The performances would often happen spontaneously wherever an appropriate setting was available. Other times were arranged and I or a lunch room aide might be asked to be a judge. When the playground performances were no longer permitted, after the ban, many of the girls could be found doing steps in the school bathrooms.

The step, "Mississippi", is performed in a variety of ways, each version having its own choreography and rhythm to accompany and accent the verbal alternations. Each version has as its core the spelling of the word Mississippi. These variations include description of and metaphorical references to the letters and on-going narratives which play with the letters as beginnings of utterances.

Thus performance of "Mississippi" is an intersection of visual and verbal codes, by using the body dramatically as an iconic sign for the letters. The most prominent, noticeable and controversial use of bodily representation of the letters is the formation of the letter s or "crooked letter". The transformation of the body into the letter s is demonstrated in a limbo-like dancing movement with one arm forming a crook at the shoulder. It is not uncommon to find an elementary school teacher asking students to make their bodies shape a letter or to treat letters as representatives of familiar objects or person as part of reading instruction. Yet although the steppers successfully perform such bodily letter representation, it is interpreted negatively; the iconic sign is dressed with too sexual a body idiom for school, and often family contexts.

Few observers actually associate the dance movement with the words or letters. The performances were not studied but only casually observed, if observed at all, by most of the staff. Here it might be noted, the role that context plays in what body movements get interpreted as "too sexual". The range of teacher responses to the dance movements in "Mississippi" included "You had to be an adult to know it was suggestive", to "It's like an orgasm." "It's like nothing I've never seen before. It could be a nice kid, then all of a sudden it just comes over her." "It's like an epileptic fit." "It's bad." "Nasty."

At the kiddie discos sponsored by the school and parents, movements very similar, if not identical, to those in "Mississippi" are performed by children to no visible concern. On one occasion at a school disco one mother told me that she had seen "Mississippi." In a disapproving tone she said that her kindergarten daughter had learned it on the street. But she explained that she knew it was bad and had told her daughter that she was not allowed to do it anymore. We dropped the subject and the two of us began to dance with daughter and several other children. As we danced, the young mother instructed the children in a step which included a similar limbo-like pose to one in the performance of "Mississippi".

Despite the fact that many of the conventionally school-taught literacy skills are performed competently in the speech event, they don't "count" as literacy or school related. Because the skills are adorned with sexual overtones, they are interpreted as defiant and improper. By using sexual innuendo and other markers of ownership in verbal context and body idiom, they have created interpretive frames that signal to any onlooker, that if indeed this is a literacy related performance it belongs to the children and not to the adults who ordinarily teach them rhymes, syllables, homonyms, spelling, reading comprehension, and the like.

Additional evidence of ownership and personalization can be found in a linguistic analysis of the transcribed tapes. For example, in the performance of "Mississippi" the entire line of girls begins with an instructional command in chorus - "Hey (name), Spell Mississippi, spell Mississippi right now." The individual called usually steps forward out of the line and performs the spelling rhyme in an oral solo as the others dance and clap and step with her. The solo performer is foregrounded and on stage. A common phrase that girls will utter as they first step out of the line to perform is "Give me room." (Or "A-gim me room", more accurately represented). Indeed not only do they ask for "room" but they are expected to take it. Having your own style within the conventions and boundaries of the performance is expected and valued. Each girl does the performance with some embellishments and markers of individuality; the movements, the voice key, the verbal play and variation with mixing rhymes as well as modifying words or adding phrases ("freaky deaky", "no sweat", "gimme room"). The degree of oral composing varies, but performers who are creative are recognized for their virtuosity and often are designated as "captains".

While the speech event is marked and bounded as belonging to the children it is clearly not a private, but a deliberately public, formal performance. It is performed in setting (front steps, playgrounds, parks, etc.) where there is usually a potential, generally varied, audience (adults, children, parents, teachers, friends, strangers, et al.,). The general enthusiasm and visible cohesion of the 'steppers' both set the event as something owned by the performers and attracts attention. The chanting is distinct and inviting, a form of broadcasting, rather than a use of the voice meant to be shared only within the group. The performance transforms passersby into audiences much the way street musicians might.

Because the performance is marked as public, teachers' expectations of propriety are somewhat jarred. It is one thing to know the rhymes and to share them in private among peers, but polished public performance is viewed by many as defiant. One teacher said, "it was meant for us to notice and meant for us to stop". On the other hand, the same teacher spoke of the event as 'ethnic', reminiscent of African folk dances, noting a similarity with performances by the Arthur Hall dancers, who had been at the school.

While teachers and parents had heard and seen the steps performed enough to notice and ban it, most had never really listened to it enough to be aware of the general content. Rather, they were aware of isolated signal words and phrases that were considered too sexual or improper. Although the chanting was in a broadcast mode it is interesting that the words were obfuscated by the melodic prosody. Once the "sirens" lured a listener, the taboo words would be heard in an almost assaulting clarity.

One must consider just what it was that the girls themselves knew about what they were chanting. The rhymes can be viewed as a ritualized practice for adolescence, an experience typical of this age (9-12), where mastery experiences are practiced for their own sake. The genre seems to have cut-off age. When teenagers perform Mississippi, it is not considered appropriate by these intermediate grade school girls who say "They too old. They look dumb." "They show off. It's fresh." These comments suggest that the behavior belongs primarily to the transitional period between childhood and adolescence. Several of the more physically mature students will stand aside when the group performs, and give a variety of reasons for doing so. When older girls did perform they considerably modified sexual movements. Though the movements and theme were sexual, the mode and key were clearly playful more closely resembling cheers. The older girls are considered "dumb" (if they did not modify their movements) because their displays are too strong and real for this genre. The younger girls are caught up in the repetition of the sounds and movements they create as a group. Like the boys who run out to play ball, they run out to do steps.

The children's excitement and enthusiasm about "street rhymes" in general and the richness the rhymes offer as a resource for teaching literacy skills, had prompted one teacher in the school to develop an entire curriculum around them. Many of the skills listed in the section above are included in her reading program. All of the skills are identified in the rhymes and then made explicit for the students (see Mitchell, Ph.D. dissertation, 1981). This curriculum however is targeted for primary grade students and based on jump rope rhymes. Rhymes were collected from around the country. The teacher then selected those rhymes she felt would be of interest as well as contain useful vocabulary, lend themselves to skill work, and finally, be appropriate for school. Topics and vocabulary not suitable for school were ruled out. Thus a rhyme like "Mississippi" would not be used because it is too controversial.

Other attempts to use children's folklore as curriculum have often been criticized by those who are concerned about issues of social control - the "neutering of folklife" and the "colonization of children's culture" (see for example Cazden, 1982; Sutton-Smith, 1982 for further discussion).

The primary interest in the present study was not with curriculum concerns *per se* but with an understanding of what messages are conveyed by these genre performances - about the performers' competencies in language and literacy-related skills, about the way the performers understand and interpret their social world and where they fit in it, and further about the reactions of other participants in the scene to these performances. Ultimately, by exploring these "webs of significance" (Geertz, 1973) we can be in a position to better understand student needs in school life and curriculum.

## Mississippi: Its Meaning and Treatment in Context

An interesting aspect of this speech event is the way it was treated. As with stylized sulking, the data suggest that there were general commonly held views about this event that were slightly different for most Blacks and Whites. In general as with sulking, it was felt that White teachers tended to be more "lenient" and "permissive" where the Mississippi dances were concerned.

Black teachers in general were less likely to permit performances of the dances and stopped them immediately. White teachers tended to be more ambiguous about the behavior, and less likely to stop it when it first appeared in the spring.

Stepping seems to be seen as a "cultural" variation of expression and communication. "Doin steps" is something that Black girls do. The musical chants and movements have been referred to by several White and Black teachers as "ethnic type dances", reminiscent of "African music," "Carribean music," "similar to the Arthur Hall Dancers," etc.

Teachers were concerned about associated racial statements and responsive to them. One White teacher told me that she had been too lenient about the Mississippi dances. She came to this conclusion when she overheard a Black teacher's comment about another White teacher being completely tolerant of the dance until his own daughter learned.

As with sulking, Black teachers and parents frequently expressed concern that the permissiveness and lenience towards the performance of steps indicated "low standards" for the students. Some parents and support staff who were influential in having it banned expressed cncern for the children's safety, suggesting suspicious men had been seen "cruising" the area as the girls danced on the playground. One youngster in response to the ban said she agreed with the decision because her mother had told her about a girl who did the dance and was raped afterwards. In this primarily low-income neighborhood, concern with crime is familiar to the children. Thus many who came out against the dances seemed to be concerned more with the girls' potential vulnerability rather than their "bad attitudes."

Those who spoke earliest and most strongly against the dances were usually Black faculty and parents who were active religiously (Muslim and Christian), and more middle-income economically. Influential parents in this community, who were strongly active in the Home and School Association, were often (though not always) representative of the higher income families in the community. The community has been characterized as one which is aspiringly upwardly mobile and concerned with styles of life that are often described by community members as "decent" (Anderson, 1980). This is consistent with the theme in the school of concern with "attitude." The dances fell into categories of indecent and reflective of bad attitudes all too easily.

Just blocks away, however, and in many other parts of the city the same dance performances met with a very different interpretation. They were also seen in these other communities as representative of Black culture, but were treated very differently. One city school known for its arts program held a spring festival where performances of Mississippi and other steps were (in modified version) applauded by large parent audiences. The International House on a city university campus was the setting for an all day festival organized by the directors of a Drama, Drum and Dance Ensemble - Matunda ya Africa (Fruit of Africa). The festival was a city-wide competition for steps, drills and cheers. The newsclipping and schedule of events below are from the Jump for Joy Festival and indicate a striking contrast to the discussion above - a very positive and proud emphasis on the Black heritage of the lyrics and dances. The implications for pedagogy are made full use of with "steps" as "educational tools" for teaching literacy skills, in the school which sponsored the festival.

There was not total uniformity of opposition to the dances even in the study site community. Some community members, both parents and staff, thought the school over reacted. They thought the kids were entertaining and skillful They also thought they were "just being kids." It is interesting to note, however, that although the Jump for Joy Festival was held only a few miles away, none of the children from the study site attended.

The particular community in which my observations were conducted might be characterized as being extremely responsive to the expressed norms of the school. Many parents who allowed the dances initially, once hearing that the school banned them, enforced the ban at home. One student who had been a stepping captain the year before told me the following fall that she didn't do steps anymore because her mother wanted her to get into the Academic Plus Program.

Another way of handling the choice was suggested by a parent in a neighboring community who stopped her daughter from doing steps, which were nasty, and taught her traditional African folk dances instead (Schieffelin, personal communication). These dance genres carry with them a hierarchy of statuses, and are seen as statements of alignment with social class. The dances (steps and folk dances) themselves may not be structurally very different but the messages they convey about social and economic class are vastly different. The Fruit of Africa's School for Understanding, mentioned in the Festival above, is in the center of a much poorer neighborhood than that of the study site, which may account for some of the difference in response. The school known for its arts program used steps as an aesthetic educational resource. Though the "arts school" community is similar to, if not higher and more middle class socio-economically than the study site community, the tone of back-to-basics and propriety is strongly influential in the latter. All these communities are Black and all three regarded the dances differently - nasty, Black culture, aesthetic peer culture. Only the last two saw it as an educational resource.

Literary genres as well as dance genres convey different social and economic alighnment.

Consider the next two rhymes:

My name is Dawn - yeah!
And I'm a Scorpio - yeah!
And I can do it - yeah!
Ain't nothing to it - woooh!

I am Rose my eyes are blue
I am Rose and who are you
I am Rose and when I sing
I am Rose like anything!

Both verses are similar in many ways, in particular they are four line statements by females, declaring pride and accomplishment in dance, song and in being. The first is a step, part of children's folklore. The second is a verse by Gertrude Stein. The second belongs to a genre of verse associated with a different status (though certainly Stein has not wanted for harsh criticism, she is a recognized member of the art elite). The following descriptions of Stein's general work might be appropriate for capturing the literary style of many of the step lyrics, though no such descriptions were offered in the study site.

> She was an empiricist, who preferred to write about observable realities and personally familiar subjects ...declarative and descriptive rather than symbolic and allusive.

> Her diction is mundane, though her sentence structure is not, for it was her particular achievement to build a complex style out of purposely limited vocabulary.... An early device...is the shifting of syntax, so that parts of a sentence appear in unusual places. Adverbs that customarily come before a verb now follow it, and what might normally be the object of a sentence either becomes it subject or precedes it. These shifts not only repudiate the conventions of syntactical causality, but they also introduce dimensions of subtlety and accuracy. ...some parts of speech are omitted, while others are duplicated; and nouns, say, are used in ways that obscure their traditional functions within the structure of a sentence.

> Stein's "notorious device" -- the use of linguistic repetition. To be precise, she repeats certain key words or phrases within otherwise different clauses and sentences; so that even though the repetitions are never exact, this repeated material comes to dominate the entire paragraph or section.... ...it would be wise (for the reader) to linger, or even to read the passage aloud, because what makes Stein's repetitions so interesting is precisely the varying relationships that the repeated elements have to their surrounding frames. As phrases are rarely repeated exactly, what initially seems identical is, upon closer inspection, seen to be quite various, for one theme of Stein's repetitions (an near-repetitions) is the endless differences amid recurring sameness. (Richard Kostelanetz, The Yale Gertrude Stein, 1980.)

A following version of "Mississippi" reflects many of the literary characteristics detailed above. It is interesting too that the theme is one that centers on brand name jeans - just about as mainstream White middle class as you can get. One only has to watch a few TV ads for jeans to know that sexuality and the Lolita syndrome (e.g., Brook Sheilds) are a central focus of American middle-class society.

Hey, Dede, yo
Spell Mississippi, spell Mississippi, right now
You take my hands up high
You take my feet down low
I cross my legs with that jigalow
If you don't like that
Throw it in the trash
And then I'm bustin out
With that Jordache
Look in the sky
With that Calvin Klien
I'm gonna lay in the dirt
With that Sergi ert (Sergio Valente)
I'm gonna bust a balloon
With that Sassoon
Gonna be ready
With that Teddy
I'm gonna be on the rail
With that Vanderbail
With the is-M is-I

Crooked letter, crooked letter I
Hump back, jump back I

The performance of "Mississippi" can be examined as an "instructional routine". In many ways the routine sounds like what one might expect in a school classroom. Directions are called to an individual to spell a word - Mississippi, a difficult word to spell at that. Yet there are several aspects of the instruction that seem to break with expected norms of speech and politeness and with predictable co-occurrence rules of classrooms.

First instead of a single teacher's voice, the entire group of steppers chant the request in loud chorus. This is the reverse of the stereotypic model of an individual teacher request followed by an entire class's choral response. The request itself has marked characteristics that counter expectations of what a classroom teacher would say.

Hey, (Wendy). Spell Mississippi.
Spell Mississippi, right now!

The request sounds more like a challenge or a dare. Consider some of the linguistic markers that run counter to expectations of co-occurrence rules. The use of the word "hey" is informal, usually considered inappropriate for school, and has a slightly threatening quality -- as if one is being "called out" rather than "called on." Further, there is an impatient tone to the demand as a result of the quick repetition "Spell Mississippi" and the conclusion "right now." It has been pointed out that teachers tend to use politeness forms frequently to modify the power and control they have. These forms soften acts of instruction that might be interpreted as face-threatening to students (see Cazden 1979). The teacher request in "Mississippi" seems to do exactly the opposite. Politeness forms are absent and the face-threatening nature is intensified even though the tone is an angry one.

The stepper who is called on to perform the spelling task usually utters a quick phrase like "gimme room" or "no sweat" as she jumps forward out of the line to begin her routine. These utterances indicate the stepper's willingness to take on the dare and the stepper's confidence that the performance is fully within the range of her competencies. Thus the instructional routine sets up an aggressive and suspicious teacher command and a student stepper who takes on the challenge with a sexual swagger and obvious confidence about her spelling prowess.

A spelling exercise, ordinarily practiced in the classroom is transformed through linguistic play and dance with a marked shift in ownership.

By reframing the instructional exchange the literacy-related behaviors are recontextualized - taken from the school's mode of literacy instruction and made a part of the children's own world. Interpretive frames are created that signal to onlookers that this particular performance of literacy-related behaviors does not belong to or count for school.

The syncopation of this spelling lesson allows children, as subordinates, to mock school instruction. In much the same way skits and jokes can present concrete formulations of an abstract cultural symbol, the images conveyed in the "Mississippi" performance can be seen as containing interpretations of the children's symbolic constructions of their own social portraits of the dynamics of schooling.

Thus the message conveyed by these students through the performance of "Mississippi" can seem quite a poignant one. It is not merely defiant. It is not merely Black. It can easily be seen as face-saving, a way of maintaining dignity through collective autonomy when confronted with the school's undermining doubt in their ability. At the end of "Mississippi" the entire group does the spelling performance in a strking flourish, declaring for all to see, their excellence as literate spellers, dancers and as kids.

The two behavioral events, stylized sulking and "doin' steps", provide "windows" through which we can look at underlying cultural themes. Both communicative events detail concrete and specific aspects of behavior that can be analyzed as to their relatedness to attitude. Both events were seen as part of Black communicative style and both were interpreted as conveying "bad attitudes." (One could easily include speaking Black vernacular as communicating the same sort of message.)

## Summary

Access to contexts where opportunity for literacy acquisition is maximized seems to be determined by appropriate dislays of attitude. Portrayals of attitude in this context are declarations (conscious or unconscious) of alignment that will inevitably determine whether or not access to literacy will be possible.

It is no surprise that students who are viewed as having good attitudes are also viewed as being good kids. The label becomes a part of the constitution and indicative of worth. Yet when we examine the behaviors subsumed under the label "attitude," we discover they consist largely of a set of linguistic, paralinguistic and kinesic communicative adornments which are associated with a particular ethnic style, and/or socio-economic class, rather than a set of character traits reflective of the nature of individuals.

The study demonstrated some ways in which a group of urban Black intermediate grade (4-6) elementary school students were allowed differential access to literacy based on social interactions which communicated their alignment with the prevailing ethos of the school. Though teachers believed themselves to be making their selections of students based on the capacity for handling certain learning and literacy skills, analysis of the data show that they were, in fact, using a very different and unconscious set of social criteria to form their evaluations. Although all the children observed over the three year period displayed extensive literacy and language skills in peer and non-school contexts, only somewere admitted to the special academic programs and higher track classes which maximized opportunities for literacy success. Despite the presence and demonstration of literacy competence, many of these children were not even seen as possessing such skills due to the fact that performances of their competencies were contextualized and embedded in attitudinal displays that were considered inappropriate. Thus, the underlying process involved, seems not to be the acquisition of literacy - implying a growing set of reading and writing skills. It appears instead to be an exchange of appropriate attidues for what can more accurately be described as an admission to literacy, a gate-keeping enterprise.

The preceding section was concerned with identifying the domain of the concept of "attitude" in the particular community being studied. The focus on attitude was stimulated by the significance it held for the participants in the setting. Attitude was the key element for student success in the school. It was the identifying ingredient for stratifying classes and tracking students. The "success" track in this particular school was an Academics Plus Program. A "good attitude" was a prerequisite for admittance. When discussing the program with a group of new incoming parents, the principal made it clear that if parents made sure the kids came with a "good attitude," the school would do everything in its power to assure their reading and writing skills and their chances of getting into "better" schools (magnate and academic schools in the city). This exchange was clear to all the participants. It was a trade of appropriate attitudes for literacy. Literacy is a commodity which is in the school's domain, and the school makes decisions as to when it will be parcelled out.

The preceding exploration into the realm of attitude indicates that the concept itself is abstract. It has different meanings to different individuals and in different contexts. Yet if the exchange was to be understood in terms of its social significance as well as its behavioral manifestations both attitude and literacy had to be understood in terms of not only the way they were talked about but also in terms of the way they functioned.

Two key events were the "windows" through which underlying cultural themes were explored. These events, stylized sulking and doin' steps, were considered in terms of the immediate shape of their performances, the metaphoric nature they suggested and the social meanings they held for the participants. The two events were selected for specific attention for several reasons. They were both prominent and controversial. They were both behaviors that consciously or unconsciously were associated with assessments of attitude. Teachers regularly evaluate attitude, yet it was difficult to identify just what went into those judgments. The articulated characteristics were an assorted set of attributes which ranged from getting homework done, and having involved parents to being respectful and lady-like. Some categories focus on "work habits" while others suggest a concern with signs of appropriate deference and demeanor. All the categories indicate some signals of alignment, if not allegiance, to the school, its ethos, and its agenda.

The silent display of stylized sulking and the speech event, "Mississippi", were seen as representative of bad or deteriorating attitudes and were squelched by, tracking which effectively selected the behavior out, in the case of sulking; and by banning and prohibiting the behavior in school in the case of the "Mississippi" dances. As demonstrated by the discussion above, both behaviors were interpreted as part of Black gestural and communicative style.

In a recent add in the New York Times, there is a picture of a striking blonde dressed in casual elegance and posed in a relaxed and sophisticated posture. The add, for JH Collectibles, reads:

> JH. It's an attitude.

Indeed, it is an easy portrayal to read. The total composite of stance, facial expression, dress, as well as overt cues of ethnic physical origins, convey a message of alignment with upper class social status. In just this way teachers read student portrayals of attitude and alignment.

Expressive forms such as stylized sulking or steps can essentially be viewed as metaphors for the human condition. The expressive forms used by the students can be seen as a message of individual (in the case of stylized sulking) or collective (in the case of "Mississippi") autonomy in the face of authority. There seems a contrast with what students were capable of in terms of literacy behavior and what was expected concerning their ability. The behaviors discussed are both face-saving devices which allow for pride and ownership in circumstances where opportunities for such prizes are scarce. The following incident might illustrate this condition.

On a recent classroom visit I observed the following interaction. The students were seated doing individual written work. There was little side chatting as they worked. The teacher was sitting near them grading and correcting their written stories. The teacher began to laugh and called for the students attention by saying, "Listen to this." She was still half laughing as she read from a student's paper, "The clouds were black. The winds howled and the bizzard was raging." Nate, who had written the prose was in the bathroom and didn't get to join in the laughter. The teacher and all the students chuckled. Some of them repeated the amusing word, bizzard, and then chuckled again.

When I recounted this incident to my undergraduate class they were horrified. It seemed to go against all the sensible teacher training rules they were coming to know. They said such things as, "That was cruel." "The boy must have been humiliated." "That behavior would cause students to be inhibited in their writing." "Teachers should treat students work with more respect." et al.

I suggested that they listen to the rest of the story. As the students continued to laugh along with the teacher, one little girl, between hearty giggles, said, "Bizzard. Bizzard...you know what a bizzard is?" "No", replied her laughing friend, "What is a bizzard?" She answered through her laughter, "A bizzard is when it's raining lizzards!" Everyone was loudly laughing now as another child commented that he knew because he saw a picture of it in an Escher painting! Finally Nate returned to the room, where all his classmates were hysterically giggling. The teacher said, "Nate, listen to this." She read the lines again, "The clouds were black. The winds howled and the bizzard was raging." Nate started to laugh, slapped his palm against his forehead and with a big smile and exaggerated look of pain in his brow said, "Aw! I forgot the L."

The situation sounded quite different as the remainder of the story was told. This incident took place in an elite private school with an open classroom philosophy. The expectations of my undergraduates would not have been so inaccurate if the incident had taken place in a traditional classroom in the study site, however. The children in the situation described above know they are bright. Their teachers know they are bright. They start from a position of confidence and power. Not only do the children have confidence in themselves, the teachers have confidence in them and they all know it.

Many times in my observations an error like the misspelling of blizzard was treated very differently. When teachers are not confident about a student's brightness and experience, and students also are not sure, a different pedogogy is employed. If a child wrote bizzard rather than blizzard it was likely he would be doing worksheets on initial consonant blends for the next few days. It wouldn't be seen or trusted as a careless oversight. Circumstances where literacy drop-off rates are astoundingly high (e.g., see Labov, 1982) and students perform below the 50%-ile on standard tests with shocking predictability, fear of failure is heavy in the air. It is the same fear that seems to emerge in response to symbols of Black "street behavior".

Stylized sulking is all too quickly read as potential hostility and violence. Stepping dances are seen regularly as statements of actual sexual experience and knowledge. Blacks and Whites alike, from parents to my colleagues at the University, made comments speculating about the actual sexual behavior of the girls who participated in steps. Overt emotional displays and verbal sexual innuendo, jokes and descriptions would typically receive very different treatment in middle-class contexts. As with the example of bizzard above, the assumptions made in the private school, where the students were trusted to know and learn spelling skills, led to a passing reminder that there was a spelling error, instead of an accusation about a skill deficiency in consonant blends in initial position in a vocabulary work; emotional displays or sexuality are met with expectations that these are natural behavior for pre-adolescent peer culture and treated as such. rather than seen as markers suggestive of "street kids" and bad attitudes.

Bateson (1972) has described what he calls deutero-learning, or learning to learn. He suggests that there are by-products of the learning process, habits of thought which result from the ways in which we experience learning. It is necessary for educators to note these by-products of various learning environments, for it is likely that it is there that our myths for sorting and stratifying the population are operating. The by-products of a learning environment where misspelling blizzard is an opportunity for creativity, laughter and group cohesion are likely to include abstract notions of power, ownership and confidence. The by-products of leanring in a setting wehere that same missspelling is responded to with worksheets on initial blends will be quite different. From the evidence provided in the discussion in the previous sections concerning behavioral manifestations of appropriate attidues, I would suggest that students are learning not power but submission in the latter setting.

One of the original concerns of this research was to identify problems that teachers saw as interfering with student achievement in literacy and language arts. "Attitude" was repeatedly offered as a major concern in the teaching of literacy skills. The research problem was to find out exactly what the label "attitude" meant in this community and how the term and concepts it encompassed functioned in relation to literacy achievement. How was "attitude" communicated, interpreted and understood were questions which guided the study. The focus of the investigation was on two specific social and linguistic behaviors which functioned as windows to unerlying themes that proved significant to the research. The ritual display of emotion which I have termed stylized sulking and the speech event of "doin' steps" were performances which were examined as metaphors for the everyday life of these children's social world. Through the use of these metaphors it became apparent that a "bad attitude" was closely associated with a conveyed message of Black alignment.

When sharing my findings with a research colleague, Andrea Robinson, who was also a resident of the study site community, she commented on the fact that these two events appeared so prominent in the observations. Agreeing with the observations, she offered a dramatic parallel that struck her. She recalled that portrayals of Black slaves in American history were frequently depicted as either sullen or dancing. The images of sulking and stepping youngsters suggests to us that we might not have come very far in our own brand of modern day racism. Young students show their resistance to the authority in control through facial gestures and body language, though they might go through the motions of their expected behaviors. Steps are reminiscent of some of the slave songs, sung almost in code, so that slave masters would not be able to comprehend the real content of their messages (e.g., songs such as "Follow the Drinking Gourd" and others associated with the Underground Railroad).

A study of attitude and literacy proved more to be a study of alignment and socio-economic status. The data suggest it might be useful to view attitude as alignment (e.g., recall the JH Collectibles example above) and also to view literacy as alignment (e.g., the status of various genres like a Gertrude Stein poem and a stepping rhyme). The key factor for success in this school community seems to be demonstration of alignment if not allegiance to the school's ethos, which in fact is compatible with, if not reflective of the dominant ethos of the community.

The fact that the two most prominent behavioral events which were significant with regard to assessing attitudes were both associated with displays of Blackness, raises some important questions. Is the school community subtly equating a good attitude with the display of a non-ethnic mainstream demeanor?

One of the problems that seems to have confused much of our literature and likely blinded us with regard to improving education where "at risk" populations are concerned is that we have glossed diverse settings and groups of people with simple and misrepresentative terms. There is no homogeneous Black community. As the reaction to stepping dances in the above discussion indicated, the neighborhoods only blocks apart regarded the dances with widely different postures - from seeing them as "low class" and "nasty" to seeing them as statements of Black pride.

Is there a trade of Blackness for success in the study site described above? The answer is complicated. Though steps were banned in the school and discouraged in the community and regularly in classes and in the home an observer could hear students being reprimanded for using non-standard vernacular, one could see the theme of Black pride very strongly dominant in the school community.

Many of the teachers in the school had taken trips to Africa. One couple who taught in the school and were also residents in the community were Muslims who regularly visited Africa and who had relatives there. This couple was very active in emphasizing Black pride in their classrooms and in the school. Simultaneously they were very negative about the stepping dances and supportive of the ban. The couple was also influential in the community discouraging friends and relatives from letting their children participate in the dances.

Another teacher in the school who had also traveled in Africa organized an African Culture Day at the school. This event proved to be quite significant for several reasons. In the fall of this year, as in the past several years, Philadelphia teachers went on strike. This year's strike was a particularly long and bitter one. Teachers who cross the picket lines and teach during the strike are often ostracized for years as a result. Strike politics are potent in the system. The teacher who organized the African Culture Day was one of five staff members who had taught during the strike. Teachers, parents and students had many angry and unresolved feelings when they returned to school in November. Their energies were turned from hostility to joint efforts by working together for the special event. Black and White teachers as well as a cadre of parents spent many hours and took great pride in their efforts. Several families in the community were from Africa (ten children in all) and they contributed as consultants supervising hut building, cooking native dishes and the like. Teachers focused curriculum projects on Black history and Black pride themes. My own son, age 12, who had lived in Kenya from the ages of five to seven was invited to give a presentation, his second such at the shcool.

A special visitor to the African Culture Day event was the ambassador from Liberia who agreed to give the main address at the assembly. The student chorus sang out in clear and vibrant tones "to be young, gifted and Black, that's where it's at", as the audience smiled proudly. The ambassador's speech was biting and eloquent and strongly empahsized Black brotherhood and strength. One story he told in order to caution future naivety of Blacks concerning Whites in a theme of mistrust met with enthusiastic applause and supportive comment from the parent, teacher and student audience. He told in poetic cadence how the White man came to his land, gave the Black man the bible, and said let us close our eyes and pray. The Black man took the bible, closed his eyes and prayed and said "Amen". When the Black man opened his eyes, the ambassador said, "We had the bible and they had the land." The audience translated well the lesson in their own context.

These examples are offered in order to demonstrate that indeed the school and the community are not attempting to squelch Blackness or pride in being Black. The examples indicate that to the contrary

Black pride and Black history are prominent themes in the school and community. The examples of sulking and stepping seem more to be associated with a certain class of Black communicative repertoire that has typically been a marker for failure in our society. Like non-standard vernacular, these behaviors will tend to close rather than open doors for Black children who are trying to be successful in our society. No matter how legitimate a linguistic or behavioral analysis of such behavior is, the key factor of legitimacy is how these behaviors are interpreted in the social world in which they are performed. For these children, most of their parents and teachers agree - the cost is too high.

## THEMES AND ISSUES IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL LITERACY STUDIES

The remaining discussion will focus on themes and issues related to the study of literacy out-of-school. The issues will be organized around methodological, theoretical and practical concerns. Many of the themes raised in the first section of this report will be directly and indirectly addressed.

### Methodological Issues

#### 1. Ethics and Racism in Literacy Home Study

There is a serious problem that any naturalistic research, concerned with studying the privacy domains of non-mainstream, minority and lower socio-economic families, must deal with. The responsibilities are great and the dangers are numerous. First, we tend to find what we are looking for, and that fact seems to reinforce stereotypes and feed an already enormous stock pile of misconceptions about what it's like to be poor and underprivileged in ours or any other culture. Anthropological studies of the culture of poverty have often been criticized on these grounds.

Those who are studying the underclass are not underclass themselves. Further they are in positions of power and privilege which they are often not even themselves conscious of, making empathetic observations and interpretations a challenge from the start. Some, who have themselves lived similar lives but left for more middle class identiy and lifestyles, have returned to ghetto life to do research. Their problems are not reduced, however, but are colored with their own struggles and reconstructed reminiscences. Take for example the fine work done by Lillian Rubin, World's of Pain. Even her title conveys a projected portrait of the "pain" of a working class existence in America. Many who are emersed in that life would not characterize it as painful, however. Notably missing in her treatment of key themes is humor, a recurring and prominent element of family interactions which I as a researcher, friend and family member in lower income households have been aware of. Rubin's more somber portrayal raises questions of bias in her perspective.

In addition to the limitations researchers bring to a home setting (see Smith, this report for further discussion), there are serious concerns and reservations from the other side. Many families do not want to be observed, especially if they are being chosen as examples of how the system is failing - and they are being depicted as failures within it. No matter whether a family is defined as "literate" or not, few would not realize that they were being studied because they were poor or had "at risk" kids. This condition is intensified by the fact that Black families and Black children have all too often been portrayed negatively in research as well as literature and the media, and there is widespread consensus that this should be ended. Recent sentiments expressed by Harry Wolcott and Ray McDermott at the Ethnography in Education Forum at the University of Pennsylvania (1982) suggest that research in education has concentrated too heavily on school failure. The combination of focus on failure and on Black children has proved unproductive on many counts.

My own experiences in conducting this research were reflective of these concerns. First I was cautioned about doing home observations with low income Black families and their children. As a White researcher the very structure of the relationship was extremely sensitive. I was told repeatedly by Black friends and colleagues, who were on the staff at the study site school, that "we don't trust White people" and that White researchers should "stop studying Black children." The study of White children or at least comparative studies were suggested as alternatives. I was discouraged from home study in the study site not only out of concern and protective response for the Black children in the community, but also out of fear about my own safety and well being. Several of the Black teachers, realizing that it was my job to conduct the research, though not supportive of the idea, being loyal and committed to our friendship, offered to accompany me on all visits to the community, acting as liaison, bodyguard and the like. There was regularly expressed concern for my safety. This was not only due to my outsider status but an extension of the fear that permeates a community where street crime is frequent and predictable. Teachers make use of police guards at all after school functions. Mothers and children do not go outside after dark. There was constant concern about staff vehicles being broken into or stolen, and I was regularly scolded for not locking up my car on the street.

But beyond fear of institutional intrusion and personal safety, there was a deeper concern about the potential for one more damaging story about Black families and the crime of poverty. I was urged to avoid studying failing children and portraying negative family scenes. "We have a lot of good children and caring families" one teacher poignantly reminded me, and gave me several names.

I was introduced to one mother in the community, not as ideal subject for study, but "because I think you'll really like each other... you have a lot in common." It was true on both counts. We were brought together by a mutual friend who taught at the school and we spent many hours initially talking about our personal philosophies and interests. What evolved over the last year was a professional working relationship and personal friendship. Andrea Robinson became an active participant on the research team and a collaborator in my research. I did not study her family. She did not study mine. Instead we read research in the field together and reacted to and discussed issues that were relevant to our own study. We reviewed written reports and field notes, and questioned my findings - in some cases Robinson doing further investigation to test the validity of my observations or conclusions. Robinson particpated in several University seminar presentations of the research, generally acting as critic and discussant. Ultimately Robinson conducted her own study of two families in the community in order to answer questions that were of concern to her intellectually as well as of concern in our research project.

I do not recount this relationship, or present Robinson as a unique example. Too often the assumption that living in a low-income community or having a low income means low expectations for intellectual capacity or interest, career aspirations and the like. As a graduate student and a single parent, my income and many of my own personal circumstances were not very different from many of the community residents in the study site. Many parents were not only actively supportive of their own children's academic futures but were concerned about their own intellectual development and quality of life. This fact is demonstrated quite clearly in Robinson's study family portraits, and was a regular finding in my interactions with other families.

Too often we point to examples of a demonstrated skill competency or successful achiever and get thrilled at the idea that in the ghetto "this little kid is reading!" "Isn't it wonderful!" Well there is no question that it is wonderful, there is something sad about finding it exciting rather than the expected norm. Many children in this community were reading before they came to school. Many parents in the community are well read, knowledgeable and articulate. Portraits of Black ghettos that have conventionally found wide audiences (e.g., Labov, 1972; Rosenfeld, 1971) may be accurate in some ways but create very misleading stereotypes that interfere with the most basic understanding of literacy in a Black community.

One of my undergraduates was doing an independent study research project in a nearby school. She had read the literature on urban education and culture conflict. Though she did find that fear was a prominent theme in the lives of the children she worked with she was constantly surprised at how bright, caring, kind to each other and to her, they were. Their values and her own were strikingly similar. Finally in a very bewildered moment struggling with what she had read and anticipated, and what she was actually experiencing she asked in mild desperation, "Perry, is this really a Black ghetto I'm working in?" The question stands as a sad testimony to our research to date.

During the strike in the fall of 1981, I arranged for my undergraduate class in Education, Culture and Society to accompany me to the Alternative Strike School organized by one of the local churches and staffed by volunteer parents and older church members. They had 250 students from first to eleventh grade in attendance. Before going to the site, several of my students had (in predictable fashion) attributed literacy failure in Black urban populations to non-caring parents and to students who had a lack of desire to be academically successful. Both assumptions were ammended with some embarrassment after the visit. Two of my students spent the morning working with high school juniors. The following excerpts from their essays were representative of what they wrote that morning:

> I feel as though the Philadelphia School System is the worst in the country. There is never enough money to fund it. That's why every year the students must go through the sad ordeal of a strike. We the students, especially high school students, are the ones who suffer during the strike because without the essential education, we who would like to go, won't be able to attend college.

> I think this strike is effecting mostly the upper classmen of the highschools. We are college bound and without a highschool education we will not be able to get into the college we want.

> As far as the teachers they're not the ones to blame. They were promised extra money and no layoffs but they didn't receive it. They do have a right to express their feelings if a wrong was done to them.

> As an upperclassman I feel as though I'm being evicted from an education and I do need and want an education.
>
> Why should the students have to suffer because the teachers and the board can't settle their differences. This year, it's the city's fault. You hear Mayor Green talking about a little $235,000,000,000 problem. Well, if you ask me, I'd say that's a pretty big problem.
>
> I can understand where the teachers stand. After all, you can't raise a family, pay the mortgage and keep a car without money. The Board's got to understand that you don't get something for nothing.
>
> So now, Green's talking about cutting the first semester altogether. Now the students are being put under pressure by being given more work. This just isn't fair. I mean I want my full year of education the way it should be given.
>
> ...I think I've made my point very clear and my message is obvious: I want to go to school!!!

Several of my students volunteered to tutor juniors who were preparing for their SATs after this experience. The tragedy is that these highschool students aspirations and abilities were a total surprise to my Penn undergraduates.

It should not be surprising that many Blacks respond with serious mistrust when home studies are suggested. If the research community continues to reinforce and perpetuate already pervasive racial and ethnic stereotypes, what good will they be in ameliorating the economic and educational problems that already overwhelm urban ghettos? It is, in fact, hard to put together many facts I uncovered in my research with existing portrayals of Black America. Consider the following example of such a conflict.

The discussion here is mainly concerned with urban life and education. However, many of the residents in the community are from the rural South, particularly the Carolinas. Many of the Black teachers in the school who do not live in the neighborhood but in more affluent suburbs and middle-class interracial communities are also Southerners. When talking about North Carolina, teachers and children will refer to "goin home for the summer" to visit grandparents and aunts and uncles. Many of the teachers who are from the South come from families who have seen it as their primary goal to educate their children. Families of six to ten siblings who all went to college (helping each other financially) are now teachers, doctors and lawyers, and are a frequent occurrence in these teacher biographies. Yet to look at accounts in the literature (e.g., Heath, 19 ; Ward, 19 ) the documented studies of Blacks in the South focus on non-achievers in literacy domains.

It is also of interest to note the somehwat aggressive tone that is used by those writing how-to-do it books in ethnography in our own culture. "Getting in" is the way anthropologists have tended to discuss gaining access to privacy domains. Consider all the reasons why that might be offensive to any community and especially a Black community. It might be a better technique to consider learning to wait to be invited and to respect those who never let you in.

## 2. Transforming Literacy Artifacts

In recent years there has been a strong interest in the research community to explore the social meaning of literacy, its functions and uses in the real world. Following the lead of scholars in the field of anthropology and sociolinguistics (e.g., Szwed, 1982; Heath, 1982) studies such as this one set out to discover what actual literacy behavior and literacy events would look like. Unfortunately one of the labels the anthropological roots of this strain of research brought with it was that of the literacy artifact. Images of material and static things come to mind too quickly. When archeologists examine artifacts they are the durable hardware that survived through time. By labelling and listing artifacts associated with literacy found in home environments we forget too often that it is only in the artifact's meaning to the participants in the setting that they are at all relevant to the study of the culture of literacy (see Smith, this report, for full discussion of the concept of the culture of literacy).

Consider the following examples which characterize the quick and meaningful transformations of artifact of literacy. The example will follow a set of literacy artifacts over the space of only a few minutes in time (see work by Scribner and Jacob who are sensitive to changing meanings of artifacts in context, 1981).

> Set A: The teacher has given an assignment in language arts class. Students filled in the blanks on a ditto sheet of practice drill on verbs and adverbs. The artifacts are a set of thirty papers which demonstrate formal learning

> and skill performance in language arts. The artifacts document who knew right and wrong answers concerning the skill. The artifacts stratify the class into who knows and who doesn't.
>
> Transformation: The teacher collects the papers. Once turned in the teacher announces that they will review and check answers together and each student will mark another's student's paper. Nancy is selected to distribute the papers from among several volunteers.
>
> Set B: Nancy searches through the papers. Finds her best friend's and puts it at the bottom in order to save it for herself. She then responds to the girls' requests for friends, and boys they like papers. (By asking for a boy's paper they can announce a crush, or feed one by touching HIS paper.) Boys take papers that are remaining. Getting Jeff's paper Mathew throws it down yelling "I'll get germs. The set of literacy artifacts is no longer the record of skill measurement it was to the teacher or will be in a few hours to a parent at home. The artifacts have quite a different meaning - they are alignment symbols for peer social organization. The name on the paper and the fact that it was that individual's product is important, not the number of right and wrong answers. (The incident is taken from observations by Karen Klemish, 1982.)

The very same set of artifacts are transformed in function, use and meaning in seconds as they pass from the teacher's hands to Nancy's. In doing observations and descriptions of literacy environments (books and magazines in the livingroom, etc.) it is all too easy to forget that interaction with the artifact in use with individuals in various contexts is where their meaning is found rather than a mere description of the material itself. One of the Drake boys who says he is not a reader likes to buy and own his own books. When the books are noted, their meaning is found in his view of why he has them, "I like collecting books. I don't read it that much, but I like collecting them.... So if I would...do want to read them, I could read them and plus I just have them to have them." (See Robinson, this report.) Even as time passes in his room the meaning of the books he owns changes from situation to situation.

The present study was extremely sensitive to both issues discussed in this section. They are both raised as methodological limitations which were struggled with but by no means totally overcome in the study.

## Theoretical Issues

The ethnographic study of out-of-school literacy skills and practices can produce answers to the questions we have raised initially producing new knowlege. Even more interesting, the findings can restructure the knowledge base from which vantage point we posed the initial set of questions, thus suggesting altogether new ways of looking at the problem. In this section several findings which inform existing misconceptions in the literature and thus generate implications for practice will be considered.

### 1. Genre: Narrative vs. Expository Text Comprehension

There is a widely accepted assumption in the literature in literary criticism and in the literature on reading comprehension that narrative prose is simpler to read and to write than expository prose. Very basically speaking narrative usually refers to a story whereas exposition is descriptive and informational text. A concern with developing flexible readers, that is, readers who can adjust their reading performance to the demands of various genres (e.g., poetry, fiction, exposition), has been a dominant theme in curriculum development and instruction in language arts for the last decade.

In a recent report on the Kamehameha Early Education Program (Calfee, et. al., 1981) some observations comparing comprehension of expository and narrative text were presented. They conclude that when presented with the two genres, narrative is the simpler to comprehend.

> Even first graders can comprehend stories, but by the time they leave third grade, they need to be able to comprehend other kinds of texts better than they do. The ability to handle expository text structures comes less from everyday experience and more from formal education. (p. 43)

The notion that expository text is more decontextualized suggests it is more characteristic of formal learning and associated with higher level cognitive and abstract skills acquired in school contexts.

But consider some realities. First, it should be mentioned if only in passing, that it is very difficult to find pure representations of literary genres in text. Most narratives contain a significant amount of exposition and similarly characteristic features of narrative are often found in expository text. In the real world of literature, gnere lines are crossed with predictable regularity.

Further observations conducted in out-of-school contexts in this study show a very high incidence of expository text in informal use by preschoolers on up through adolescence. Most often observed as high interest reading material for preschoolers other than story books (i.e., narrative text) where books about prehistoric monsters, cars, trucks and machines, science, wildlife and dictionary alphabet books. Older school age children often read sports cards, magazines, newspaper (especially sports, comics, adds, movie and TV listings), catalogues, model directions and the like. It was interesting to note that expository text was favored by boys generally. Another interesting aspect of this noticeable frequency of expository text is pointed to indirectly in Robinson's section of this report. Her observations show dramatically that readers, who declare themselves non-readers (that is, they say they don't read, or read very much), read regularly, but they read almost exclusively expository prose rather than fiction narratives.

Consider again the Calfee experiment mentioned above which compared narrative and expository text comprehension. Here is an example of the expository text they had their subjects read:

> An amusement park is opening in town next Saturday. There will be a parade, fireworks and free admission on opening day. More than five thousand people are expected to attend.
>
> Work first began on the park two years ago. At that time the site was an unused field. It was filled with weeds and trash. Although occasional attempts had been made to clean it up, nothing had worked.
>
> Since then more than fifty rides, a playhouse and a picnic ground have been built. Many trees and bushes have been planted.... (p. 42)

The text is a passage from the Interactive Reading Assessment System (IRAS) (Calfee and Calfee, 1981). It is listed as being of reading level 4.1. The exposition is described as being "among the simplest forms" (p. 36) that is, a description of an object with a list of characteristics which follow. Students read the passage aloud, were asked to tell about what they had read (free recall), and then specifically questioned (probe questions). This text was more difficult to recall and took longer for subjects to read aloud than a narrative of the same reading level.

Consider the following exposition:

> THE FIRE LEVEL (Use VISUAL AID #3)
>
> The staircase leads upward to a stone landing with two pathways projecting from it, north and south. The pathways and the landing are about 1' above the surface of what seems to be a sea of fire. The flames lick upwards to heights of 2' to 3' above the surface of the sea, and breathing is a little difficult due to the smoke and sulphurous fumes. Across the 160' diameter circular chamber is what appears to be a wrought iron spiral staircase leading up to the ceiling 20' above, but your vision of it is somewhat obstructed by the fire giant standing before it.

This second example of expository text is not taken from a formal school lesson. It is a brief and rather simple excerpt from a game many boys actively play around the middle school years (grades 6-8). Some continue through high school and into college years but most prominent are groups and clubs of primarily preadolescent boys who meet regularl- to play Dungeons and Dragons or D&D. Though some girls do play, it is primarily an activity for boys. The game is described briefly in Robinson's report by one of the Drake boys who plays regularly. In the study site the game was not played by great numbers of boys. Those who played, generally were introduced to the game as a result of exposure to it from other more middle class and racially mixed communities. Boys who went to schools outside the immediate community brought it back to siblings, other family members and neighborhood friends. The game itself requires a great deal of reading and a large assortment of books, manuals, guides, cyclopedias and modules are available. The expense of these literacy materials has no doubt kept it a more middle class indulgence. A widely held assumption by adults who know of the game is that it is for "gifted kids." However, none of the children whom I observed playing ever suggested that when discussing it with me. When asked if kids who can't read very well can play, the answer was that it doesn't matter because "the dungeon master helps them." The role of the dungeon master (described in more detail by the Drake boy in the Robinson report) is to lead players through various adventures, consulting reference books to enhance the game.

The excerpt from D&D is offered here to point out three ironies. The first is that the population who most actively play this literacy fantasy game corresponds with the population which has been depicted as contributing the literacy drop-off rate: that is, intermediate grade age males. Whether successful in classrooms in school or not, these young males rush home to get their school work done so they can play D&D (often much more challenging reading than their school assignments). Students will get to school early, organize themselves at lunch (assigning roles for buying, etc.) so that they have enough free time to play, and the like. D&D, though replete with skill demands of literacy and math comparable to school assignments, belongs to peer culture and is seen as fun, and not part of school skill repertoire. In the days of back-to-basics and fill-in-the-blank instruction, Dungeons and Dragons represents a literacy explosion in rich factual knowledge, vocabulary, spelling and original creativity. It raises a serious question for educators when a population which performs poorly in reading in a school context enthusiastically and voluntarily engages in more demanding literacy texts for fun with friends.

The second irony is that while most reading and language arts curricula break literacy skills down into discrete hierarchies of subskills and assume learners must work through the skill sets systematically and linearly, D&D players approach and succeed in their literacy task demands in a much more organic and holistic manner. They use what might be called the sink or swim approach. They jump into the game totally and the strokes and moves are perfected as they float. But most important, they are not alone. Learning D&D with friends is a perfect example of peer teaching and learning. Reminiscent of Bygotsky's zone of proximal development (see Vygotsky, 1978, for more detailed discussion) the learners are guided through new problem solving experiences in supportive, interactive syncrony. One teacher asked me, "How do they know when they are doing it wrong?" The question almost doesn't apply. We as educators have so broken down learning in Skinnerian frames needing immediate feedback, we forget that most natural learning even of a formal nature is acquired much differently. Consider learning to talk. Imagine trying to correct a new speaker - each time a two word utterance is offered, requiring a full sentence with noun-verb-noun pattern. For months the child will produce only two word utterances and if someone is attempting to force something different, only frustration on both sides will result. Peer teachers seem to know this. In my observations of D&D, I have never heard a comment like, "He'll never learn this" or "You're so slow". It's as if they intuitively understand the philosophy of mastery learning. They also seem to believe in the ability of each player. We as teachers could take lessons. D&D pedagogy might be effectively used in school classrooms.

The final irony offered in the D&D excerpt is that it is indeed expository prose. In fact most, if not all of the text in the D&D literary materials is exposition - in many cases challenging exposition at that. Ethnographic observations have often been called for in order to discover naturally occurring patterns of behavior which might inform educators so that teaching practices might be more compatible with actual experiences in children's lives. Not too often have we thought of ethnography as being able to inform practice in a very different way. Most practice and pedagogy is based on cummulative scientific theory and knowledge we find in the literature. No doubt behavior is at the core of theory, but much of our theory is so well established that the behavioral link is forgotten and the theoretical assumptions are not questioned. There are few ways to keep educational theory opened because practice tends to fix it. Evolutionary theory is regularly rethought, revamped and argued...but who would question that expository text is harder to comprehend than narrative text. It is part of the tradition of literary criticism and part of the lore of curriculum. But the ethnographic observations conducted during this study demonstrate clearly that difficulty of text has very little to do with the established literary genres of exposition or narration. The children's folk categories of genre have much more to do with ownership than readibility formulas or conventional genre labels. D&D belongs to peers; it is very difficult for adults to follow and learn, tedious to read and remember. Kids find it fun and exciting. Recall the exposition in the Calfee example above and the D&D example. It would be easy for a D&D player to recall details of a description that are part of a highly motivated game. Genre as conventional curriculum and instruction theory uses it is hardly useful as an explanation for reading difficulty. And certainly if we do follow Calfee's suggestion that more work on exposition is needed, we might profitably turn to young D&D players to see how the pedagogy should be planned. (A more complete discussion of Dungeons and Dragons as a literacy event will be found in Gilmore in B. Schieffelin (ed.), forthcoming.)

## 2. Discontinuity or Reciprocity

A consistent theme in anthropological studies in education has been that of culture conflict and discontinuity. Schools and school personnel represent one set of values, norms and beliefs and the home and community represent a different and conflicting set. Different interactive patterns, discourse styles and the like are thrown together in classrooms where conflict and failure result. Implications usually take the form of recommendations for one side or the other compromising or some form of more sensitive mutual adaptation.

The literature on oral and literate cultures falls neatly into this pattern. Though analysis of the data collected for this study suggest that the links between oral and written language in schools, for example, is strong, the scholarly literature in related disciplines suggests otherwise (e.g. Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz 1982). The literature suggests that especially in minority Black communities and generally in the home, children operate within an oral tradition and in school, where formal learning takes place, the primary channel is in a literate tradition. Heath's (1980) position on this matter is reflective of the bias in the present discussion:

> There is little or no validity to the time honored dichotomy of "the literate tradition" and the "oral tradition". Cultural diversities in the uses of writing, reading and their links to speaking provide not a dichotony, but multiple-faceted continua in which oral and written language structures and functions intersect in a wide variety of ways (p.2).

My own observations have suggested that (1) no one I observed surrounded by all the various forms of media and print was growing up in an "oral tradition"; and (2) schools primarily teach, practice and test reading and writing skills in oral ways. Though I will not argue these points here, this second point, since it is an original view, may require a few examples.

Consider the very beginnings of reading instruction, where emphasizing phonics, teachers repeatedly ask students to orally produce words that begin with the same sand as "bat", or a word that rhymes with "race", et. al. Comprehension is also most commonly taught or at least quizzed (no one quite knows how to teach it) orally. Finally consider that few report cards are given in the lower elementary school grades based on numerous written tests. Progress is usually monitored and evaluated in the oral interactions of teachers with their students.

This brief digression into the debate surrounding oral and literate behavior is quite central to the discussion which follows. When teachers were asked what some of their students problems in literacy were, their own answers usually covered a range of language behaviors which included both oral and written performance. Often the statements were such that it was not possible to tell whether teachers were themselves distinguishing the two. For example, teachers might say: They have trouble with syllabification, rhyming and medial blends. All of these are word analysis skills which are practiced and tested both orally and in writing. They might say that the students can not identify main ideas. This comprehension skill is most frequently practiced orally in reading groups. Most reading group sessions I observed were, in fact, Round Robins, that is, students would take turns reading orally and be corrected in their performance by the teacher as they went along.

The distinction for teachers seems less to be between oral and written modes than it is between sanctioned and non-sanctioned modes. Just as closer examination of the oral and literate dichotomy indicates that there is an ongoing dynamic interaction of characteristics attributed to both traditions; so a closer examination of home and school culture reveals interpenetrating overlapping dimensions of reciprocity rather than two distinct arenas in conflict (see Gilmore and Smith, 1982, for discussion). The church in the study site offers an excellent example of the fallacy of the discontinuity explanation.

The church is a central institutional presence that is felt in the community was studied. There were several churches within an eight block neighborhood. All children I came to know in the community were affiliated with a church. They usually went to Sunday School and regular services. In addition the church offered numerous services and activities which were widely used and participated in by members. Some families church hopped (went to different churches), went to churches outside the immediate neighborhood (usually associated with other family members) or went to different churches (husband and wife belonging to two different churches); but few families did not have any affiliation with church at all. The church I was most familiar with was typical of large churches in the community in terms of the resources it offered and the values it represented. They offered a pre-school day care education program which served close to fifty children, in addition to their Sunday School and summer program. On site they had an extensive library which included "just about everything", for example, philosophy, drama, world literature, encyclopedias, dictionaries, a variety of educational materials, in addition to an extensive literature on religious topics. Volunteers manned the library in order to provide homework assistance and a regular tutoring program. The church offered a special scholarship to its members which guaranteed that any child who went to college would have all their books paid for. The church also sponsored a special drama group which was largely comprised of teenagers. They put on plays, usually with religious or moral themes. Their reputation was excellent and their performances were widely attended. Spelling Bees were another feature of the church activities. (Some of the words from 12 to 15 year old group included: Spirituality, seraphim, sepulcher, pestilence, transfiguration.) Speakers contests were held where bible verses were recited from memory, or for the older youngsters, original compositions on religious and moral themes were recited. A final example of the church's community influence was that of the Strike School they organized when the Philadelphia teachers went on strike in the fall. With parent volunteers and older church members they supervised, with their limited resources, 250 students from first to eleventh grade (the school system provided for graduating seniors).

The examples above are offered to demonstrate the literacy resource the church represents in the community: supportive of schooling, helpful with homework, assisting in reinforcement of language arts and math skills, and motivating good performance as well as nurturing college aspirations. Additionally the church values are regularly articulated and enforced. One incident which occurred at the Strike School seems particular significant in this regard. A visitor had come to see the school in operation. She was a representative from another church nearby that was planning to open a school as well during the strike. I was free to show her around and I did. We went into one class where an older church member, in her late sixties was giving a spelling test, "Vulgar. The dress she wore was vulgar and in poor taste. Vulgar." When we left the room the visitor said to me, "You know that wasn't just a spelling lesson. She was teaching values. Yes values...tht's what's the matter with the public schools...no values...they accept any behavior."

One has to question the assumption that the community values are in direct conflict with the school's. I believe these examples demonstrate that the school emphasis on good attitudes and the community sentiments about decency and values are very much in synchrony. We must look deeper for what's going wrong. If indeed the school and community are in agreement as they are in this community about what they want (good attitude and successful school performance) together they are constructing an agenda that is not satisfying to anyone. Too many children still are unsuccessful and scores are still low. Why?

## Practical Issues

Ogbu (1981) has suggested that the mistrust and conflict between school (a White institution) and the Black community "reduces the degree to which Black parents and their children accept the values of the school and their willingness to cooperate" (p. 26). We have seen from the data presented here that this is not the case in the community discussed. Though trust is an issue, the community and school are quite responsive to each other, not only in terms of ethos but also in terms of curriculum. A back-to-basics and acadmic plus skill emphasis was desired by a large number of supportive parents. Curricula which may have at first met with support because "white people use it" were ultimately rejected as disorganized and confusing (e.g., a primary grade literature program) as a result of parent pressure. Families and church are extremely cooperative about complying with school demands about homework, even to the extent of rigorous daily summer assignments being carried out. There is almost a reciprocal collusion at work rather than a battleground of conflict.

One parent who had seen several of her children go through the school and then transfer to a special school for gifted students described the school as having a "Back-to-Basics mind set" which emphasized skill mastery but offered no higher order cognitive experiences. She suggested that the community liked the idea of Academics Plus because though it had a back-to-basics nature the connotation was they were getting the three R's and more. "Getting more" sounded like an "honor" and carried a "sense of prestige." In keeping with the theme of getting more it is interesting that the graduating award for perfect attendance regularly is the only award to get a standing ovation.

What are students actually getting more of? The concern with sub-skills takes a toll, also pointed out by another parent to me. She said her child was being taught mechanics like spelling, vocabulary and punctuation, but couldn't really express herself in writing.

Much of the literature in literacy learning suggests that formal learning is characterized by the ability to decontextualize (e.g. see Scribner and Cole, 1975). Learners must be able to put aside contextual givens in the mundane surroundings and formulate abstract notions presented in print. Much pedagogical emphasis has been on getting a learner to move from empirical thinking to theoretical thinking (i.e., see Scribner, 1977), from informal to formal learning. What I suggest is something like a backfire - there is a danger that decontextualization can pass a productive point on a continuum and become what Edelsky (1981) has termed "instructional nonsense."

Several prominent themes characterize the school and the community. There is a lack of confidence that these kids will make it. Any behaviors that signal the possibility of getting marked for failure are quickly squelched. There is fear that time is being wasted. Curricula that don't look like kids are working and learning but possibly playing are met with mistrust. Kids who misspell a word are not seen as momentarily careless but as skill deficient. Girls who do steps are suspected of being sexually too experienced. It seems that both the kids and the adults know what the projected scenario for the student is - child as potential failure. The condition creates a fearful climate where trust in the child, for the teacher, the child, or the parent is never something one is confident about. The call for meaning in learning is poignant in this setting. Until it is assumed that kids can mean, they will never be allowed to. Examples from steps and D&D show that skills regularly sought after in school are widely and enthusiastically practiced in peer groups where ownership empowers the learner. In homes and classes where mistrust is a theme, learning is powerless and lacking in meaning. The trust conflict is not so much between Black and White, adult and child; but far worse, individuals do not trust themselves - teachers, parents and kids.

Teachers do not trust themselves. One teacher in the school was widely known for her high I.Q. She belonged to an elite club whose membership requires a minimum of 160 I.Q. I observed her giving a brief introductory talk to a group of parents whose children were admitted to the Academics Plus class for the following year. The teacher was enthusiastically reporting that the social studies and science curriculum would be considerably improved because they were going to have new text books, enough for everyone. There is no argument suggested here that there is something wrong with getting a set of social studies text books. But the teacher, who had travelled as a tour guide all over the world, was widely read and acknowledged by her peers as articulate and a fine writer - not to mention her I.Q. range - humbly told the parents that she didn't feel confident to teach social studies without the books.

Just as teachers are afraid to let go and trust their own knowledge, as demonstrated in the case above, they are similarly afraid to let go with their students. Fill in the blanks and convergent answers dominate homework and the curriculum. When my own son came to the school to give several slide shows on Africa the comments that followed acknowledged his intelligence but focus was much more on his demeanor: He's mature. He's like a man. He's so confident. Poised. I can make no observational comparisons with the children in the school for equivalent situations. Though I suspect that the same behaviors are possible in the experience of giving a slide show or talk about something you know a lot about - no such opportunity was given to any student during my study. The activities of African Culture Day were typical. Students played a very small role in the event, primarily as polite audience, coat checks and the like. Even the greetings at the door by students giving out programs were memorized and uniform comments. Though children regularly read aloud from original writing or recited poems and the like for assemblies, in my three years of observations I rarely saw any student talk freely for more than a few minutes in a formal learning context.

A traditional back-to-basics sub-skill curriculum feeds well on the fear and lack of confidence prevalent in the community. But does it get kids to be literate in the true sense. An example I hesitate to use seems necessary at this point. (I am hesitant because the example does not show a pretty instructional scene and puts a teacher on the spot. But it captures much of the tragedy of well meaning yet destructive pedagogy and might prove helpful for understanding the concerns addressed here. I urge the reader to take a sympathetic posture.)

A teacher in one Academics Plus class was going over a list of vocabulary words with the class. The word they were doing next was dismal. She asked someone to use dismal in a sentence. One girl volunteered offering, "The clouds were dismal, dark and gloomy." The teacher answered, "No. Dismal means dark and gloomy. That's like saying repeat again. Now a good sentence for dismal would be, The clouds are dismal today."

Assuming the teacher is not stupid - which she is not - why would she reject the student's sentence of somewhat literary prose in favor of the rather bland and non-literary one she herself offers. Consider first what the teacher is doing. She is testing her students to see if they know the meaning of the vocabulary words - which she likely assumes are new to their experience. The sentence will put the word in context so that the student can prove they understand the meaning. It might even be seen as cheating to use synonyms with the new word to disguise the fact that the word is not fully understood. Another sub-skill rule, not to be redundant, dominates the literary sense and poetic cadence. If the teacher believed the students could easily understand the word dismal, she might have been able to listen differently to the response. This scene is reminiscent of the instructional mockery in performing "Mississippi." The teacher seems to be daring the children to use the word - assuming they can't. As in "Mississippi," the students spell the word with virtuosity but it goes right over the heads of an audience who really didn't hear it - this poeteic prose isn't heard. Only the suspicion that it hides ignorance registers. Seen in this light the teacher's sentence may have been offered more as an example of how to be honest (not hiding behind dictionary synonyms) than as an example of good prose and composition.

Formal learning has frequently been associated with the ability to decontextualize. By getting out of the here and now, the learner demonstrates an ability to be more abstract. To some degree this process requires putting aside the things you do know and accepting the givens in print. In the now classic syllogisms which were given by Scribner and Cole (1975)to the Vai, correct answers necessitated that natives discount counter information they may have had in mundane life in order to get the correct answer. Those who didn't, did not decontextualize and did not succeed. In home and school examples I observed an extreme kind of decontextualizing occur. If what one knows is suspect from the start, and fear and lack of confidence dominate interactions and self-concepts, there is often no check on the extreme of decontextualizing. That is, one accepts that nothing makes sense except the teacher's manual. Notice-- I do not even say the teacher-- for even they question their own abilities as we have seen. It is this extreme decontextualization along with the cooperative attitude on the part of students, parents and schools that undermines potential for meaning in learning taks, and ultimately meaning and comprehension in literacy.

How do parents overcome this? One parent told me "Everything I do is motivated by my kids." In the third grade her young son made no progress: a literacy drop-off candidate. She and her husband had him retained at their request - a parent decision. The next year he was making excellent progress but because of his record he now was not being considered for a special academic school where his parents wanted him to go. when turned down by counselor and principal these parents went to city politicians, influential church members, et al. to change the circumstance. They were successful. And so was their son who proceeded to do excellent work at the new school. Other parents were described by this mother as saying things like, "If it'll be, it'll be" where their kids school life is concerned; but parents who say, "But things don't work that way" and have the confidence in themselves and their children to change things have taught us all a lesson.

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# THE ROLE OF LITERACY IN THE ARNOLD FAMILY

Ave Davis Merritt

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# THE ROLE OF LITERACY IN THE ARNOLD FAMILY

## INTRODUCTION

In the case study that follows, I have focused upon two girls who live in a low-income neighborhood in West Philadelphia and who attend a nearby public school. The study is part of the team research conducted by The Graduate School of Education on community perspectives on the uses and functions of literacy funded by NIE. The case study presents observations on literacy activities in one home. A description of the geographical community in which the Arnold family lives is found in the final report of the earlier study the present one builds upon. (Hymes, 1981)

The Arnolds live in a low-income, Black neighborhood. Their house is located one half block from a commercial thoroughfare which divides a residential area of the city. The public school attended by the children is located just a few blocks from the house. All of the residents of the block where the Arnold home is located are low to lower-middle income and many are long-time homeowners. The Arnolds live in the house in which Mr. Arnold grew up.

Mr. and Mrs. Arnold completed high school. Their parents did not attend high school. Mr. Arnold has two sisters and a brother; one sister attended business college to become a secretary and the brother attended college "for a while." The other sister completed high school. Mrs. Arnold has two brothers who attended college briefly. Her two sisters completed high school.

With the exception of one of Mrs. Arnold's brothers, the sisters and brothers of both the Arnolds live within a few minutes to a one-hour distance by car. The Arnolds maintain regular communication with relatives through telephone and visits. Mrs. Arnold sees one sister several times a week.

Mr. Arnold had recently been laid off from a construction job when I first met the family. During the time of the study, he worked at odd jobs in the area of his expertise--painting, roofing, carpentry and the like. He was, at the end of the study, in the process of forming his own business for general contracting. Mrs. Arnold has worked as a practical nurse. During the time of the study she worked part-time in the school her daughters were attending in a program funded for the employment of parent-assistants.

## GRACE

Grace is an eleven-year-old sixth grader. In school, she is an achiever. She is at or near the top of her class in the grades she makes and wins year-end awards for academics as well as for physical education. She is polite, neat in person and in the way she orders her belongings: school desk, papers. She does not fall behind in her work; she keeps good notes, is punctual and conscientious. With most of her classmates she is friendly but restrained--the latter primarily because she strives to maintain good behavior and shuns any kind of interaction that might lead to verbal or physical confrontation. She is sensitive to the fact that her good behavior and scholastics create resentment among certain students, and she handles this by maintaining as low a profile as she can without compromising her class standing. She is not aggressively or overtly competitive; she is not a hand-raiser. She occasionally raises her hand and always knows the answer when called upon.

Grace's good behavior in school is not a front she maintains for the teacher's benefit alone. She appears to have internalized the value system that she has been taught at home so that her conduct is similar whether under the eyes of the instructor or not. For instance, she does not pass notes, because she believes it is "wrong" to do so although she sees students getting away with that activity every day. Also, Grace never loses sight of her vulnerability to her peers' vengeance because of her "goodness". She feels that certain other students would welcome the opportunity to discredit her. They would not "stand up" for her as they would for others. None of this is to suggest Grace is cowardly or unable to defend herself. When no other resource presents itself, she is able to defend herself verbally and, if necessary, physically. She has fought on occasion and handled herself well at it; that she knows she can fight, if pressed, assists her self-esteen and, as she believes, aids in keeping disgruntled peers from constantly intimidating her. She sees herself as being embattled but persistent. She would prefer to attend another school in which other students would not be "jealous"; she believes that a school with higher academic standards than the public school she is now attending and with a more selective student population would permit a more serene, more compatible environment for her.

Although at home Grace is still a "good" child--essentially obedient and helpful--she is considerably less restrained; she is even flamboyant--often aggressive verbally, physically restless and openly competitive. By her own estimation and that of her parents, she is also occasionally moody. Home is the arena in which Grace, in contrast to her younger sister, finds context for releasing her energies in the least restrictive manner. She readily assumes leadership among young relatives and friends and can be, in her mother's estimation, overbearing in her zeal to determine what the play activities should be and how they should be conducted. Her manner of getting her way with the other children is as goodnatured and laced with humor as it is persistent. The only meanness she displays is in a relentless but jovial brand of teasing. Grace is most relaxed and rambunctious at home--that is, actually inside the house or just outside on the steps or sidewalk (there is no front yard, and she is not allowed to play in the streets). She is less so in playing with neighborhood children and is most restrained at school. Her incidents of disobedience at home revolve around distractedness--for instance, becoming involved in a TV show or in reading a book when she should be helping her sister with homeowrk--more than ill humor or determined willfulness.

## MARIAN

Marian is 6 and in the first grade. Like her sister, she makes high grades. She is self-conscious about following in her sister's footsteps and is disparaging of herself when she does not perform as well as she thinks her sister might have ("I can't help if Grace is smarter") but gleeful when she outdoes her sister--as, for instance, the semester that she scored in a higher percentile on the schoolwide achievement test than her sister. Although, as her sister did in earlier grades, Marian has received teacher reports stating that she needs to build "self-confidence", Marian is more comfortable with her peers outside the home and has not, as yet, suffered the resentment that her sister receives from other children. As Marian's mother states it, Marian is more "streetwise". In other words, Marian knows how to mingle with her peers in such a way as to protect herself. She does not come home crying; she does not have to receive "beatings" as Grace did in the early grades for "crying a lot and being timid."

## LITERACY AT HOME

Grace provided memories of her own early reading training.

> Interviewer: Do you remember learning how to read?
>
> Grace: My mother taught me how to read and my kindergarten teacher. When I got to first (grade), I was almost ready to start reading...I was talking when I was about 24 months. I learned how to read fast. I mean talk and walk.

> Interviewer: What do you remember your mother doing to help you learn how to read?
>
> Grace: She would learn me, like, two-letter words and get get me to remember them. And then she would write a word and put the picture beside it, like "son" and put the picture, son. "Boy"--make the boy. And then I would get used to seeing the word and knowing when I see it. And then when I read them, I know how to read them. But I still wasn't too good. She would help me, and then when I went to kindergarten, they learned me a little bit more, and when I went to first (grade) then, I was ready to learn how to read then.
>
> Interviewer: Do you remember your mother reading to you ever when you were little?
>
> Grace: She'd read--my father--they would take turns reading me bedtime stories. Now I read my sister bedtime stories, and once I read one, she wants me to read them all.

Months later, Grace showed me some of the books she said she read to Marian at bedtime. Those books included Little Engine That Could, Little Red Riding Hood, The Three Bears, and A Good, Good Morning. At that time, Marian offered, in a tone of confidentiality, as soon as her sister left the room: "She doesn't read to me every night--just some time--'cause she be sleepy."

Obviously Grace's "memories", as of walking and talking, were supported by stories told her by adults. The following is her answer to the question, "Do you remember when you first started writing?"

> Well, first I would try to write in cursive, but I just scribbled then. And then I started. My mother would do the dotted words, and I'd trace them and dot the words about so many time I'd get tired of looking at them, and then I'd write them, free hand, like my sister does. And then after I write them freehand, she'll give me another word. Then every once in a while, she'll ask me how to spell them. Now like my sister, she'll remember how to write them, but she won't remember how to say them all the time. But her name, she's good at her name. She learned how to write her name when she was two. She had a hard time--I didn't

> like that time, learning how to write her name. She'd get mad. All you got to say--"Say 'G'". "Ch, do I have to again?" She got so tired of saying it over and over.

The most specific information about early reading at home was offered by Grace and by her father, whose account of reading to Grace at bedtime agreed with her own telling. Although I had few occasions to talk with the father because he was usually working when I was there, his conversations reflected a detail-mindedness that was characteristic also of Grace. Mrs. Arnold tended to speak more in generalities and to be less talkative than inclined to hear me out, and then to respond.

Books that were not purchased by the children's parents in the pre-school years came from relatives and friends. Once Grace had started school, the main sources of books were the Weekly Reader Club as well as the public and school librarieis, in addition to the above sources. Grace "put Marian's name down" to receive the Weekly Reader books until Marian became old enough to join a school reading club herself.

Grace as "Teacher"

The girls play together at home more than with neighborhood children. Much of this play takes the form Marian's being instructed by her older sister. In fact, Grace enjoys the role of teacher whenever she can find opportunity. Mrs. Arnold says that she sometimes has to ask Grace to "leave the children alone." "Children" may include at various times cousins and/or friends who become "students" for Grace, who is always the teacher. Grace tried to teach her eleven month old cousins to say "boo", according to Mrs. Arnold: "She told the baby to watch her lips and kept at it until the baby got it." Mrs. Arnold says that Grace's insistence upon instructing younger children is probably due to "the way I brought Grace up, by telling her she could do anything if she tries, and now she tells everybody else the same thing."

In addition to bedtime, Grace reads to her sister at odd moments after school and on weekends. Grace also listens to the stories her sister makes up. Grace calls these tellings "stories"; Marian's conception of what a story is, is less certain. When I asked if she wrote stories in her first-grade class, she said "Yes", and showed me pages of factual materials which she had copied from the board. I asked if she were ever permitted in class to make up something out of her own head and write it down, and she said "No". Whenever I asked her to tell me a story, she would begin with a traditional children's story; Grace and I would encourage her to make up her own "story". "You tell me plenty of them," Grace would say. Marian's puzzlement at that point indicated that she was not certain what we were asking. My own assessment is that a story to Marian is a series of connected thoughts, fictional or non-fictional, that are written somewhere or that have been written in some place. "Story" is conncected with the expression in writing; she does not see "story" as Grace and I were speaking of it--as a "made up" or original telling, whether oral or written. "Writing", on the other hand, means simply making letters or performing the physical exercise of it, whether letters or sentences.

Grace has odds and ends of basal readers and trade books she and her mother have picked up at thrift shops that she uses to assist Marian in learning to read. The books vary in reading levels. Marian, however, prefers Grace's books to her own and attempts to read them, isolating words she knows and saying them aloud. The learning activities that take place at home, as structured by Grace to include at various times reading, writing and arithmetic, are often called "playing school" by all concerned, the girls and their parents.

## Playing School

Playing-school activities are distinct from homework activities although the tasks involved are essentially of the same nature. Playing school may be a pre-planned, structured session using school-type materials--workbooks, basals, records and games--with several children, or it may be an informal, spur-of-the-moment engagement between the two sisters. This activity can be approached with great seriousness, particularly between the two sisters.

In the following notes, Grace and Marian are joined by a friend and a cousin, both boys, aged nine or so. They have just listened to a record, after which Grace asked factual questions: e.g., "What did the man say he wanted to be?" Marian was the only one to answer the questions correctly.

> Grace: Y'all got to remember. Y'all didn't listen again.
>
> Marian: I was the only one listening.
>
> Grace: Okay, Y'all have to tell me the shapes. Now sit back, sit back. Who can tell me what this first shape is?
>
> Greg: Circle
>
> Marian: You shouldn't have called out. Raise your hand and tell me what this shape is. Bill?

Bill: Circle.

Grace: Who can tell me what this one is?

Greg: Square.

Grace: Why do you keep calling out, Greg? Marian?

Marian: Square.

Grace: You ain't gon get no turn till you stop hollering out. Don't holler out. Who knows what this is? Greg?

Greg: Circle.

Grace: Who knows what this one is?

Bill: Triangle.

Grace: Huh?

Bill: I said triangle.

Marian: I know. Rectangle.

Grace: How about this one?

Marian: I know.

Grace: Wait, Marian. If I put both of these together, what will it be? Greg, stop being funny.

Researcher: What did he say?

Grace: A goat.

Greg: A goat.

Grace: (With amusement) Okay, you gon' stand in the corner. You been hollering out. You been saying funny stuff. What is this? Okay, Marian.

Marian: Half a circle.

Greg: Half a circle?

Grace: Right. It's a half a circle. If you put both of them together, you'll have a circle.

The boy I have named Greg is a Down's Syndrome child. Grace had selected material that enabled each child to give a correct answer at some point. The lesson above was followed by one in "reading."

Grace: How many of y'all like reading?

Greg: Me.

Grace: Raise your hands. You keep hollering out.

Bill: My hands are straight.

Grace: Put your hands up. Okay, we're going to do some reading.

Greg: (Horseplay between him and Bill) Hey, boy!

Grace: That's why I had y'all sitting apart. Okay, just hold that (gives out workbooks). Hold that. Don't write.

Bill: Don't write! We don't have a pencil.

Marian: I have a pencil, Bill.

Bill: This is easy.

Greg: This is easy.

Grace: Y'all don't even know which one I want y'all to do. I might want y'all to do one all the way in the front. (Gives out pencils) Okay, I'm going to start with Greg. Now I want you to look at each box, and I want you to count how many things in the box and put it on the line. Okay?

Greg: One, two.

Grace: Don't tell me. You do it yourself. (Turns to Bill) I want you to draw a line from the picture...

Bill: I know.

Grace: Bill! You do that to your teacher in school?

Bill: No. (Laughter)

Grace: (Laughing) Greg, do your work. Write it on the line, how many it is.

Greg: One, two.

Grace: Well, write "2" on the line. (To Bill) I said from the picture to the word.

Bill: That's all right.

Grace: You drew it from the picture--I mean, from the word to the picture.

Bill: So?

Grace: You draw from the picture to the word.

Bill: So? (Laughter)

Grace: Bill, you're stubborn, boy.

I would have been more surprised by Grace's labeling of "reading" to the above had I not observed similar activities labeled "reading" in a fourth-grade lab for children with reading problems at the school Grace attends. It's noteworthy that the children did not protest the activity as being misrepresented. "Reading", to a large extent, is making sense of the symbols in a book, no matter what the book is and what the symbols are, just as "writing" is making letters or sentences on paper. The school presents the children with long hours (cumulatively speaking) of experiencing the skills factor of literacy activities without reference to context or meaning. The children are reflecting this orientation in play. It does not matter that Greg is really counting, which is an example of Grace's individualized lessons to give each child success. At the end of the lesson, Grace write a large "C" across each child's page, which each proudly pointed out to the others. The Arnold's practice of emphasizing that an activity has been successful is evident throughout my observations of them.

"Playing school" may also be as simple an engagement as Grace's questioning Marian about animals on the way to the zoo ("What's a pachyderm?") based on school work that Grace knows Marian has had.

## Games

Commercial games of one type or the other are played several times a week--at times daily--by the Arnold children. Parents less frequently join the games but do so at least a few times a month. Games include such traditional ones as Scrabble, chess, Monopoly and checkers as well as newer, inexpensive electronic games based on the player's skill in remembering and reproducing a pattern of sounds of varying pitch or a series of numbers, and the like. The children also have commercial games that are updated versions of traditional games. Although their father has taught them chess rules, the children have developed their own rules for playing the game, similar to the rules for checkers.

Board games or games requiring elbow room are often played on the living room floor, which is covered with a large rug. The mood is one of cheerful competitiveness. Grace teases her sister during the course of the game and maintains a running commentary on her own and her opponent's progress. Marian is quieter, less exuberant.

During a monopoly game, Mrs. Arnold watches the girls. She is seated on the sofa. Later, she joins in, as Marian is losing, and throws the dice herself for her younger daughter.

> Marian: (To her mother) Shall I buy again? (She asks this several times. She also asks, "Shall I shake the dice?")
>
> Mrs. Arnold: Your turn, Marian. Get lucky.
>
> Marian: Grace is a big spender.
>
> Grace: Marian puts all her money away.
>
> Marian: I put it away so nobody will steal it.
>
> Grace: (Laughing) She keeps her money is safe security.
>
> Marian: I keep my money wrapped in plastic. I hide mine.
>
> Grace: Marian has to go to jail.
>
> (Mrs. Arnold takes the card and reads it, then shuffles the cards again.)
>
> Grace: You're cheating (with good humor). Every time Marian gets bad luck, you shuffle the cards again (laughing).
>
> Mrs. Arnold: I want Marian to see that she can have good luck, too. (Marian gets a good card.) See, you can have good luck, too.

The foregoing conversation and conduct of the game demonstrate aspects of the relationship between the sisters and of the mother towards the two of them that can be seen as well in the way homework is handled.

## Homework

Grace does her homework without assistance. Then she helps

Marian. When the homework is finished, Mrs. Arnold looks at it and signs it, a requirement of the school the girls attend. Mrs. Arnold examines Marian's homework thoroughly, to see if it has been done correctly. If not, Marian must do the work again. There are times when Grace and Mrs. Arnold become involved with the correcting of Marian's homework, if the particular assignment has proven difficult. As can be seen in the notes below, the doing of homework becomes an engagement among the three that extends beyond the superficial task. The concentration with which Grace aids her sister depnds upon her mood. Mrs. Arnold blames the age difference between the two for Grace's lessening patience with her sister. In the example below, Grace and Marian have started out the door when Mrs. Arnold asks about homework.

> Grace: I didn't have any, and Marian is finished.
>
> Mrs. Arnold: Bring it here and let me see it.
>
> Mrs. Arnold sits on the sofa. Marian sits beside her. Grace stands over the sofa and points at Marian's homework book.
>
> Grace: That was supposed to be "book". You wrote "cook". That was supposed to be "pot". That was supposed to be "a". You messed it all up.
>
> Mrs. Arnold: See all that (errors). You've got to work on that some more.
>
> (Grace takes the book and leads the way into the dining room.)
>
> Mrs. Arnold: You didn't leave enough space. You've got to do it all over.
>
> Grace and Marian haven't gotten started correcting the work before Mrs. Arnold calls out: Bring it here. I'll erase it. (Grace and Marian enter the room again. Mrs. Arnold makes erasures in the book. Grace points and says what corrections should be made. Marian sits next to her mother.)
>
> Mrs. Arnold: I want it to be neat. You see, that's what happens when you rush.
>
> Marian picks up a loose sheet of homework, glances at it and puts it down again. Mrs. Arnold picks up the sheet and points at each word. Grace stands over the sofa and points out Marian's errors, as before. Marian reads a sentence aloud, and Mrs. Arnold says: That's right.

Grace: I was going to write that, but you can only write four sentences.

(Marian reads a sentence aloud, and Grace reads it, also.)

Grace: That's a good one.

(Mrs. Arnold reads a sentence and corrects it.)

Grace: That's what I had.

Mrs. Arnold: (gives the homework to Marian) Take your time and do it corrctly. (Mrs. Arnold gives the book, in which the final work must be copied, to Grace. Grace and Marian sit in the armchair together in front of the TV, which is on. Mrs. Arnold goes into the dining room.)

Grace: Copy this one and that one. Don't copy that one. Copy these two.

(Grace begins looking at TV while Marian is copying. The TV has been on the whole while but ignored up to this point. Grace comments on the story and Marian looks up and says something about the story. Suddenly both are looking at TV. Mrs. Arnold comes in and turns off the TV.)

Mrs. Arnold: That's why you can't do it right. (Then she turns to me.) They were doing homework while I was out (earlier) with the TV on. That's why they couldn't get it right.

As in the games, Grace's performance is more independent than that of her sister. Her mother and sister expect her to lead the way but also to assume much responsibility for Marian's well-being. In one instance, when the girls started putting away a game called "Connect Four," Mrs. Arnold asked them to "finish" playing. Grace had won five times and become bored. Mrs. Arnold gently scolded Marian for not "paying attention", and the girls were requested to play the game a few more times so that Marian might start paying attention. That day Marian continued to lose, however.

Grace has an investment in pride in relation to everything she does in assisting her sister; what she does becomes her own performance as well. In the homework notes above, she insistes that she has instructed Marian correctly and has created appropriate sentences and that Marian has mis-copied. When Mrs. Arnold makes a correction, Grace protests, "That's what I had." She stands to lose face, at least within her own mind, when Marian is not successful at a task on which she has given assistance.

Much effort is expended in seeing to it that Marian is successful and that the rate of achieving success is at least competitive with that of her older sister, given the age difference. Marian herself becomes acquiescent to the strategies, intended to ensure her success. She takes it in stride when Grace and her mother take charge of the homework book and come up with the sentences and when her mother throws the dice and also "cheats" by reshuffling cards so that she can "have luck, too."

## Reading for Pleasure and Meaning

In addition to "playing school", games and homework, the girls' literacy activities include those required by certain tasks--e.g., the reading of a label or recipe in cooking. The reading of signs or answering questions (What does that sign say?") on a trip may be a way of "playing school".

For Marian, reading, as labeled and performed, is still primarily skills development. Grace did not begin to enjoy reading as a personalized, pleasurable activity until she became a fifth grader. Prior to that, she claimed, although she read at home and although she scored in the 90th percentile on reading achievement tests, to dislike reading. It appears that until Grace reached fifth grade, the reading-as-skill aspect of reading remained too dominant for her to relate to reading except in mainly academic terms. During the time that she claimed to dislike reading, she was writing short stories at home and keeping a diary. She seemed to have discovered a personal relation to writing before she made the same jump in reading. Story, however, was always an important part of her life, as it is to her sister. This relation to story and the habit of keeping company with books--in addition to the encountering of a teacher who encouraged and assigned reading-for-meaning activities--were responsible for Grace's consciously changed relation to reading. Grace herself admits that the new teacher "has us do a lot of reading, and the others didn't." During the last summer, Grace proudly told me that she had read fifteen books so far that summer. She was keeping a list of the titles.

There is evidence that Marian will make the leap earlier than her sister. She has received the benefit of Grace's enjoyment of books and has listened to the stories read to her from Grace's maturer, more interesting books. In fact, she tries to read those stories herself, as she tries to jump double-dutch as her sister does and ride a two-wheeler, and the like.

Although the influence of the new teacher is deeply significant, past experience suggests that Grace would certainly have begun eventually to relate to reading in a personal way. Reading-for-meaning activities are a part of her experience with her parents.

For example, on a zoo trip Mrs. Arnold, Grace and Marian first speculated about animals whose identities they were not certain about, then Mrs. Arnold and Grace read the accompanying descriptions and lastly simplified them for Marian. In time, such attention to reading for information and meaning, though the instances may not occur with the frequency that a perceptive teacher would ensure, would certainly have paid off in its way.

Writing

Observable writing instances are far less frequent than reading. Much of the writing done by the children relates to homework. Playing school requires writing of a type that mimics school writing tasks. Such games as Scrabble require a tally. Otherwise, writing is done--or referred to--by the children when they want to underscore the officialness of an event. For example, Grace requested that everybody in the room write down their choices as to the winner of a dance contest, then asked, "How many voted for....?" naming each child in turn who had participated. She made no attempt to collect the ballots or to look at them, and when she announced the winners (everybody was said to win), she reepeatedly looked down at the "official" tally in her hands although no true tally had been made. On another occasion, Marian asked me if I wanted to write down a recipe for peanut brickle she had copied off the board in class, then paused to wait to see if I would begin writing. Obviously, in this latter incident my actual writing down the recipe rather than just stating that it looked like a good one (which I had done) was the indicator to her whether I was serious about the peanut brickle or not.

The fourth use of writing is that related to personal expression. Grace occasionally writes down one of Marian's stories. Marian's own expressive writing is drawing, which she does periodically. Grace draws to illustrate stories thtat she writes and has written since she became able to handle the skill. The drawings that the girls make are their own versions of pictures they have chosen to copy from magazines and books. In addition to her stories, which have as their subject matter pets and playmates and family situations, Grace keeps a diary which she considers to be private. Her mother, however, unknown to Grace, reads the diary to keep track of what her daughter is thinking about and doing.

In the following notes Mrs. Arnold responds to a drawing in watercolors made by Marian:

> Marian drew a picture of a boat, with her own choice of watercolors, then showed the picture to her mother.
>
> Mrs. Arnold: That's nice. But put some water under it so you'll know it's a boat.

Marian took the picture and painted water under it, then brought it back.

Mrs. Arnold: Put a sun in it.

Marian shrugged, said she didn't want a sun. Mrs. Arnold said she should put one in. Marian took the picture back and painted in an orange sun, then showed it to her mother.

Mrs. Arnold: Where are the (making motions of sun rays--spokes going out from the sun)?

Marian: I don't want any.

Mrs. Arnold: Why not? So it will look like a sun.

Marian: The sun is setting.

Mrs. Arnold: Oh. (Then to me, the researcher) She has a mind of her own.

Marian: (bringing the picture she had used) I copied from this.

Mrs. Arnold: Well, you didn't put everything in it.

Marian: I didn't want to.

The instrusion is an extension of Mrs. Arnold's desire to have her daughter create as successful a picture as possible and to instruct the child to that end; her persistence is also probably an offshoot of her habit--as in reading Grace's diary--of involving herself as fully as she can (the ends justifying the means) in the doings of her children so that she can offer them the fullest extent that she can of protection and guidance and instruction.

The children's attitudes towards the uses of writing are more mixed than their attitudes towards reading. There are negatives attached to writing in their experience. For example, writing is used as punishment by some tachers ("Write 300 times..., etc.") One instructor, according to Grace, collects the notes she catches and random scribblings of children from year to year--she keeps the same class for several grades--and presents them later to parents as a kind of cumulative evidence of wrongdoing. The same instructor requires that the children maintain a daily log. As Grace perceives it, the purpose is to have a record of one's activities and thorughts that one may look back upon later in life. Even this exercise, however, carries in Grace's mind, a mixed message:

> Grace: And she (the teacher) says if we live to be ninety, we can look back at what we did on December the 29 or something, and then we can see how we wrote it, and she said she's going to give us our ______ grade books back, and she's going to let us see some of the words we didn't capitalize and what we didn't punctuate, and we're going to say, boy, that was dumb, and how we spelled words--things like that.

Writing can be used for what Grace calls "dumb" reasons, as in the case of another tacher who has made name plates for the children's desks although, as Grace explains, the teacher knows all the children's names and all the children know one another's names and where they sit. Writing can be used inappropriately; Grace surmises that a painted mural of zoo animals, concealing a construction site, will soon be covered with graffiti ("This [animal] looks like ____________.")

Although writing is certainly perceived positively, as in the stories Grace writes and as a result of commendations she receives--she won a school short-story contest as well as a trip to Washington based on an essay she had written about community responsibility--the fact is that she mentions more negatives regarding its uses than the uses of reading.

## SCHOOL

Although Grace and Marian have maintained excellent grades and have scored well each year in the achievement tests administered by the shool, their school experiences have not been without problems. Grace's difficulties have been primarily with peers, to the extent that her parents have explored alternate possibilities of schooling for her, with no success since they cannot afford private or parochial schools. The school system has a few schools for academically talented children, but those schools have long waiting lists, and the Arnolds have no access to strategies that might gain preferential status for Grace.

As Grace sees it, certain of her schoolmates are "jealous" of her. They want her to fail. The children who have given Grace problems are themselves among the better students. Grace's difficulties lie not in her superior academic abilities but her unfailing good behavior coupled with the fact that she makes an effort to be a good student and does not appear to be simply "winging" it. She takes good notes, does her homework and is attentive in class. The others may do well but are able to mask the fact that achievement has any importance to them, if indeed it does. As a consequence, they are the ones who raise their hands wildly in class when the teacher asks a question whereas Grace must maintain reserve in order to stave off resentment. Grace's mother acknowledges that her daughter's problems are more political than otherwise when she says that Grace is not "streetwise". That is, Grace does not know how to keep on good terms with certain of her peers without relinquishing anything of importance.

Mrs. Arnold has preferred to have her daughter in a non-parochial school from one standpoint: she feels that Grace is sufficiently values-conscious; she is uncertain about the benefits of adding to that a heavily doctrinal educational experience.

In the early grades Grace would often come home crying. Her mother's response was to spank her for being "timid". Grace feels that the other children think she is "spoiled". "Timid" becomes "spoiled", depending on the perspective. Grace's solution to the dilemma has been to do as well as she can in school while maintaing as non-threatening a posture as possible. She wins most of the awards in her class, however, and is often singled out for praise by her teachers, a condition which brings the commendation she privately seeks as well as the attention that in some instances creates problems.

Prior to her sister's entering school, Grace expressed concern in an interview that she would have to defend her sister among their schoolmates. As it has happened, Marian has proven to have more difficulty coping with teachers' demands than peer demands. Marian wants to follow in her sister's footsteps academically. Her first-grade teacher considered her to be an ideal student--quiet and cooperative and responsible. Marian has continued thorugh second grade to feel more intimidated by the teacher than by peers.

Mr. and Mrs. Arnold hope each year that their children will have good teachers--teachers who will assist the children in feeling at ease in school as well as advance them academically. They believe that it is their responsibility to get to know the children's teachers, to ask questions and to voice disagreements, if called for; stated otherwise, their attitude is supportive but watchful.

## MRS. ARNOLD - A WORKING PHILOSOPHY

Mrs. Arnold believes that people must act to improve their circumstances to the extent that they can. She believes that, if people assert themselves individually and collectively, they can, if not completely alter their conditions, make matters mor bearable. She responds to the immediate or close-at-hand opportunity--to attend a meeting, to speak against ills, to contribute time and energy to a cause. During a home-school meeting she was chairing, she advocated that parents attend a meeting to represent the school's interest in a federally funded in-school program which was in danger of being cut. One parent protested that he did not believe parents' showing up at the meetings would have any impact upon whether or not the program would be cut; the decision would be made elsewhere. Mrs. Arnold's response was that, even if the point was accurate, that the decision to make the cuts would be made regardless of parents' attendance, it was all the more important that the school be represented by parents because, if the funds were not all cut and decisions had to be made as to who would receive and who wouldn't, their school would stand a better chance than others because of the interest the parents had shown. During a long and bitter teacher's strike, Mrs. Arnold enrolled her children in one of the alternative schools held in churches and volunteered. She argued with a neighborhood pastor who had refused to host an alternative school because they were a "bandaid", that to have the alternative schools was better than to have nothing.

She believes that the geographical community and the school would be better if people cared enough to do what they could to improve conditions. She has faith in the cumulative power of small actions. She wishes that her children could attend a better school--that is, one with greater consistency of instructional standards and a student population that was select enough that her daughters would not have to fear intimidation because of their good behavior (and would not become "too grown" too fast--become exposed to knowledge and ideas [regarding sex primarily] beyond their ability to assimilate constructively)--but knows that if such a transfer is not possible, she had best do what she can to help improve the neighborhood school that they must attend.

She does not have specific ambitions for her daughters. She wants them to achieve "the best they can." Doing "the best" is coming to grips with whatever the immediate task that confronts them is. For herself, she must protect her daughters so that they can have a chance for a future: that is, protect them from the possible abuses of others, including peers and teachers--and protect them from the possible abuses of others--whether the obvious dangers of the urban environment (on a shopping trip, Mrs. Arnold wept when Grace was "lost" for several minutes from the area where she was supposed to be browsing) or the more subtle dangers that attend any relating to others, including peers and teachers--and protect them from their own misdirection (the reading of the diary). Mrs. Arnold believes that if she is responsible to the here and now, the future will take care of itself. She states that she was not encouraged when she was young to believe that she could accomplish whatever she desired; her concern that her daughters have the experience of success and realize that they can be successful is an effort to correct through her children the errors she believes her own parents made.

Mrs. Arnold's encouragement and assistance of her daughters in their education can be seen in perspective of the general outlook described above. She does not have clearly defined expectations as to her daughters' future as it would be influenced by their literacy/academic skills. On the other hand, she is perceptibly pleased that Grace names the public high school that is of all others in the city most selective adacemically as the one she wants to attend.

## ADAPTIVE STRATEGIES

A factor of interest about the Arnolds is that they approach many tasks with a form of control or carefulness. Much of this carefulness is essential if they are to survive at modest income levels and at the same time have money for gifts and recreation. Mrs. Arnold does her basic shopping for food once a month. Outings are planned so that money will be available for treats. On a zoo trip the children bought souvenirs for their father, who did not accompany them that day, as well as for the two closest cousins. There is no sense of deprivation in the Arnold home; the children are well-kept; they enjoy toys and games of a durable sort. Christmas presents included games and a large doll for Marian as well as clothes and books. Although one surmises that in the household a little must often go a long way, the visitor feels no strain on that account. Children and parents are generous-hearted. On the outings I enjoyed with them, I was treated as a guest, with the Arnolds prepared to "treat". If a venture cannot be approached in such a way, with generosity and ease, it simply is not undertaken.

The attitude of carefulness, however, can be traced through other aspects of the Arnold's activities, in circumstances seemingly unrelated. The effect on the observer is that of a reserve regarding the way an activity is approached and carried through. The reserve is protective; it ensures that a certain control can be maintained so that children and parents do not have to experience negativism to any degree that would undermine the enabling optimism that guides them. A by-product of this general attitude is that seemingly insignificant as well as significant decisions are made with the same tone.

In walking to the zoo, Mrs. Arnold and her daughters follow a route that has been determined by their father beforehand although he is not in attendance. Along the way, Grace and her mother agree that the route is the long way to the zoo. They have been aware of this all along but persist because this has been the agreed-upon route.

Mrs. Arnold says that she no longer goes to private employment agencies in looking for a job because the agencies acquire a job that lasts only long enough for the agency to receive the full amount of its fee; then the employee is laid off and has to start all over again. She says that people tell her, "Go back to school," but that people go back to school and still can't find a job.

At the zoo, although a sign tells us which line to stand in (we have our tickets), Mrs. Arnold has us stand in the nearest line; then she goes over to the line under the sign and inquires before beckoning us over. Our manner of proceding once we are in is to determine the nearest building of interest, then to start at one end and make an ordered examination of the animals from one cell to the next. We never cross from one side of a building to the other, bypassing exhibits and then coming back to them. Although the buildings often have front and back entrances, we leave the way we have entered in order to regain the path we have begun.

On a shopping trip, we walk several blocks in order to be able to stand at a stop where two possible buses converge, so that we can board the one that comes first. From one direction, two buses approach, the one in front appearing crowded, the other clearly not so. We board the first rather than risk that the second will pass us by. Going and returning, Mrs. Arnold mistakenly purchases for everybody passes that she does not need.

We begin shopping at the nearest shop to the bus terminal and move up one side of the street before crossing over. Merchandise in that area is in approximately the same price range. Mrs. Arnold looks in the windows first, tries to

> determine what might interest her, then goes directly to the spot, not browsing on the way. If she is disappointed in the merchandise she has sought, she leaves the store directly.

The carefulness exhibited as a conscious and perhaps not always so conscious strategy must be viewed against the fact that the Arnolds have moved twice in the last three years.

## METHODOLOGY

I visited the Arnolds over a period of seven months, at least once a week the first four months and less frequently the last three--my later visits focusing on special occasions such as trips or a home-school meeting or a visit to the home of a relative. I had established acquaintance with the family while working with a previous research project. Mrs. Arnold agreed to participate in the current study because she felt that any information gained that might lead eventually to an upgrading of the academics of children in the public schools was welcomed. I had explained to her that I would be looking at the reading and writing practices of her children in the home, with hopes that I might learn something that would shed light on factors that contributed to children's performance in the classroom.

Since I recognized that it would not be possible for me to be in the home daily, initially I asked Mrs. Arnold to keep notes on the reading and writing practices of her daughters. She did so for three weeks. However, the task was burdensome, and I withdrew the request, not because she was unwilling but because the time required was more than I felt I should ask of her.

I usually had a tape recorder with me but used it only on occasions that were "interviews"--extended conversations during which I asked questions inspired by the moment--or during an activity that otherwise would have included more than I could possibly reconstruct: e.g., a long "playing school" session. Mrs. Arnold had given me verbal approval of the use of the tape recorder whenever I saw fit, and therefore I did not have to ask on individual occasions. I never attempted to conceal my use of the recorder.

On most occasions I simply took notes. The family became accustomed to my note pad. No one ever asked what I was writing although I offered the information if I felt it was called for. For example, at the home of Mrs. Arnold's sister, I requested permission to write down a description of her living and dining rooms, which contained a notable quantity of bric a brac. She not only gave permission but provided information about several of the key objects, including cost and circumstances of purchase.

I never brought out the pad immediately but gave my attention to the occasion: e.g., on a walking trip, I made notes mentally and rehearsed them until a suitable time arrived, such as a pause to make a purchase from a street vendor, to jot down reminders that I would later flesh out.

My acquaintace with the Arnolds lasted in all over a period of roughly two years, from the point of the previous study to the end of the current one. Where appropriate, I have included information gained in the earlier study, when the younger daughter was a pre-schooler and the older daughter a fourth grader, as it had had bearing on the current study.

# LITERACY FUNCTION AND USE IN A CHINESE FAMILY FROM VIET NAM

Bambi B. Schieffelin

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Bambi B. Schieffelin
Graduate School of Education
University of Pennsylvania
June 1982

NIE report on Literacy

## INTRODUCTION

This report on literacy in the lives of a Chinese family from Vietnam is based on ethnographic field work in a West Philadelphia community and school. In this study literacy has been examined as a social process, something that is organized by the cultural conventions individuals bring to the task and as something that organizes individuals in dealing with a new set of tasks. The focus is on V, a 9 year old boy, and his family and friends. One of the most important findings of this study is that V, like other Chinese children who have arrived in the United States in the last several years, has developed a number of successful strategies for getting assistance with school and literacy related activities. Because he cannot receive assistance in school-related activities from his non-English speaking parents, his requests for assistance are primarily directed to English speaking adults, individuals who are outside his family network. To be sure, the networks of assistance are available to V and other Asians in his situation, that of recent arrival to the United States. However, what this means is that is eliciting assistance, the non-English speaking child may be involved in developing a range of social relationships that are very different from those of the English speaking child who may expect to receive assistance from family members.

Another important finding of this study is the extent to which V and his older siblings transmit important cultural material to their non-English speaking parents because of their school-based literacy skills. They must act as translators and mediators in dealing with a range of forms (school related, job related, medical, tax, etc) which present a vocabulary and structural organization that differs from the types of written materials that young English speakers of a comparable age must deal with.

Furthermore, the assistance given by these young children can be seen as a "Literacy Role Reversal" in that they must help their parents with written and spoken English which is unlike the typical patterns of assistance in English speaking families. What this suggests is that young children, in providing assistance with literacy-based skills are in fact facilitating their parents' entrance into a new society and acting as socializing agents, a role usually restricted to parents in English speaking families. It is beyond the scope of this report to answer the question of why some immigrant groups are comfortable with this

"Literacy Role Reversal" and others are not, but it is important to raise and eventually investigate the question.

Another issue raised in this study concerns the nature of the "literate environment" and its role as a prerequisite in school-based literacy skills. There was no evidence of early parent-child book-reading and later casual reading by school age children and yet the children in this study used books as resources. Another resource pertaining to literacy-related activities concerns letters, and this is examined as an important genre and information source for these families.

Finally, an important theme throughout this ethnographic research concerns the role of the researcher as an instrument of the research and as a resource for those being studied. It was only by letting those around me inform me of what they needed to know was I able to know what they needed and wanted, one of the main findings of this report.

The child who is the focus of this report is a 9 year old boy named V who came to this country in January 1979 with his family from Saigon, Vietnam. V and his family are Chinese and speak Cantonese, Mandarin and Vietnamese. They live in West Philadelphia in one side of a 3 story twin house. The house is occupied by V's parents, a brother 2 years, a sister 5 years, a brother 7 years (3rd grade), V (4th grade) a brother 12 years (5th grade), a sister 14 years (8th grade), two male cousins 19 and 21 years old and a grandfather. Other members of the extended family living in Philadelphia often visit and recent arrivals stay with the family for varying lengths of time.

Cantonese is the language of the home. V's father speaks some English, his mother less. His grandfather speaks only Cantonese and Mandarin. Others in the household speak English with varying degrees of fluency. V's older sister studied French in Saigon and has several French books in her room which she says she likes to read. Most of the reading material in the home is in Chinese: books, magazines and newspapers, though occasionally the family buys an English newspaper. The children under 12 cannot read Chinese. V's parents and the members of the household over the age of 14 can all read in Chinese. V's mother has taught him about a half a dozen Chinese characters, but he says that it is hard to learn them while he is working on his English. The family owns a television and on the weekends often go to Chinatown to the Chinese movies.

When V arrived from Saigon he started school in the 2nd grade at one of the largest elementary schools in Philadelphia. Located in West Philadelphia, it has a high proportion of non-native English speaking children, approximately 40%. The majority of these non-native English speakers are Asian refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and speak a number of different languages including Vietnamese, Laotian, Hmong, Cambodian and various dialects of Chinese. These refugees began to settle in the area late 1978 and continue to arrive at this time. The rest of the students are Black with a minority of Indian, Haitian, Ethiopian and White.

V lives about six blocks from the school and walks in with his sister and brothers. My initial contact with V was in his classroom, a non-traditional classroom with both 3rd and 4th graders. Like many others in his class, V has had the same teacher for both the 3rd and 4th grade. Class seating was mostly by choice and V sat at a table with three other Asian boys, one Black boy and one White boy. However, during the course of the classroom study the White boy and one of the Chinese boys (also from Vietnam and V's best friend) left the school.

My first visit to the classroom was on the 4th day of school after a prolonged teachers strike. The teacher, who uses her first name (J) with the children, introduced me to the class using only my first name. She told the class that I was interested in children's writing and would be spending some time in the classroom observing. She also told the students that if they had questions about their work that they could ask me for help.

The first activity that I observed was a writing time called SSW or Sustained Silent Writing. During this time children wrote in special notebooks labled SSW and were allowed to talk quietly as long as they got their work done. They were also allowed to read each other's books, ask each other for spelling help, point out mistakes in spelling or ask for clarification when they couldn't read a word or thought that it didn't make sense. Everyone participated in these activities except for the children who went to the beginning ESL class to learn English.

After I had been in the classroom for 25 minutes, the first child came up to me to ask a question. It was V and he wanted to know how to spell 'movie' for a story he was writing. Thus I became interested in who in the class asked me for help and what they wanted to know. This would provide data on what students needed to know in order to complete their morning work, the majority of which was language arts, the area of my interest for this literacy study.

REQUESTS FOR HELP Questions of spelling were the most frequent type of inquiry from all of the children. A number of the Black children often asked for help in getting started with their writing, but requests for this type of assistance did not come from the Asian children. V, like several of the other Asian children who were at a certain skill level in their reading, writing and oral language, asked for help with both writing and reading. What these children asked which was different from the questions from the others concerned questions of word meanings. They would ask what a particular word meant or refered to, and how the referent functioned in terms of what it did in the world (for example "What does a plow do?"). Additionally, I would be asked to explain such questions as "I don't understand what a hunted (haunted) house is," where the child has confused two words because of mispronounciation.

Another important area concerned the cultural or social interpretation of graphic and written materials, like asking why the heart shape is used at Valentine's Day. V would often say to me, "I just don't get it!" (even when he could read the text), referring to jokes, riddles and puns in his workbooks and other language arts materials. Such tasks such as crossword puzzles and word play would draw on common or assumed cultural knowledge, but with these Asian children, as with any non-native speaker, the underlying knowledge required to make the text comprehensible had to be explained. Both the teacher and I would frequently be asked to provide this type of assistance and explanation to these children. And it would be acceptable for them to ask because they are not expected to know about what things mean being non-native English speakers. V and a number of other Asian children in this class asked a great many questions. They took assistance well and would put effort into thinking a problem through for themselves, and not just expect an answer to a question. Thus, through a variety of questions and requests during class time, V and the other Asian children of his language level were able to elicit a great deal of information that helped them complete their assignments and become successful in school.

However, the strategies used by some children such as V for getting help in the classroom extended beyond the classroom. The patterns of resource use in school which involved asking adults who did not share a social or cultural background for explanations and assistance were continuous with the strategies used at home. Because V could not get assistance with his school work at home, he had to develop other types of networks of assistance and pattens of resource use in order to get the help many English speaking children can get from parents, older siblings and other relatives.

GETTING HELP OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM In this classroom children were given occasional homework assignments during the week. One night V called me on the telephone to ask me to help him with a spelling exercise on syllabification. I mentioned this to his teacher the next day while in the classroom. She told that he and several other Asian children would call her for help and either she or another adult in her household would try to provide it. As V got to know me better, he would call for homework assistance, all of which could be given in the evening over the telephone. Such questions ranged from asking what the VCC represented on a spelling sheet (Vowel and Consonant), discussing the rules for using colons and semicolons, followed by a callback to check the work; to asking about word problems involving math, for example, the relationships between pints, quarts,and gallons. V could not ask his parents for help with this homework. And while he has two older siblings who could have possibly helped him, they had their own homework and household obligations that kept them busy. Neither V's parents nor other members of his household and family were a resource for V when it came to his school work or any literacy related activities.

During the course of our friendship, V told me that he would telephone a number of different people to ask for assistance with his homework. In addition, he would seek help from English speakers for a variety of other literacy related tasks in order to help other family members. These usually concerned understanding information written in English as part of a form letter, form, or set of instructions. V called the following individuals during the evenings: Miss M, his ESL teacher from the previous year; Miss K, the Head of the ESL program; his current classroom teacher; the ethnographer. (There may have been others as well.) Moreover, he made use of the HomeWork Hotline, a telephone service provided by the School system for giving students assistance with homework. However, he preferred to call individuals that he knew, rather than use the HomeWork Hotline. Thus, the patterns of asking adults for help were not only used within the classroom to get help, but were extended beyond with the use of the telephone to a set of dependable adults who were willing to help.

Ideally, going into someone's home to do ethnographic research should be by invitation. One of the main reasons for my selection of V as a focus child was the fact that he consistently invited me to come to his home. In fact, while my relationships with the other children in the classroom were good, the only invitations to come visit at home were from the Asian children who were fairly proficient in English. None of the White children were interested in my visiting because there was really no reason for it. Nor was there a role. Even after several months of being in the classroom, when I suggested that I would like to come and visit some of the Black children and meet their families, they all responded in less than enthusiastic ways and became shy. Somehow this did not seem like a comfortable situation for them, though within the context of the classroom they would share their secrets with me and be my "best friend". It seems that people who come to the United States more recently and need assistance have a real role for the ethnographer. My own invitations and reception bore this out, especially in the ways I have been asked to help. Being asked over and being asked to help is one way an ethnographer can both participate and observe, and be a resource to those who do the inviting and the hosting.

In some cases, as with V's family, the ethnographer is one of many English speakers who come into the households of these families and provide a variety of assistance and information. By accepting the invitation on the terms of the host, one can see what the host wants and needs. My initial invitation came after I asked V where he lived and it turned out that he was only 3 blocks from my house. He said that since I lived so close I should come over and visit him. He wanted me to see his baby brother who was learning to say 'bye-bye'. V assured me that it was alright with his parents for me to visit and we arranged for a Saturday morning visit.

When I arrived, V introduced me in Chinese to his family and told me he said I was a teacher. V asked me if I would take him to the public library because he wanted to get a card. He said that he had been to the main library with his sister once but had not taken out any books. Once I agreed to take him, his sister asked if I could bring the B volume of the World Book Encyclopedia home for a report she was doing on Beethoven. She wrote the information down on a slip of paper and gave it to V. I offered to take it out on my card since there was no other way to do it.

At the library V and I got the forms for the library card. I suggested that V take out some books on my card and helped him select two short fiction books. We found the B encyclopedia, but what was of the greatest interest to V was the large globe of world at the library. We spent more than a half an hour looking at it. V was excited about finding places he knew about. He traced his trip from Saigon, reading all the names of the cities. I showed him the route of one of the trips I had taken.

After we left the library we went back to V's house. His parents were not home and he asked me to go over the library card request form with him so that he could explain it to his father. After I explained to him what was required, he asked me to fill out the form and leave it for his father to sign. I did. (Five months later V does not have a card because the forms have not been returned to the library.)

On another visit V asked me to explain the Reading Olympic forms to him so that he could understand what was entailed and explain it to his father. (The Reading Olympics are a school wide activity in which children read books and list them. They must get a "Sponsor" who agrees to pay a certain amount for each book the child lists and presumably has read. The money collected is donated to a charity. Children that have read a certain number of books get awards from the school in the form of ribbons. It is an optional activity.) After I explained it to V, he explained it to his father in Chinese. His father clearly did not really understand the idea behind it. Then V asked me to be his sponsor. I agreed to give 10 cents for each book. I was V's only sponsor. V filled in the forms with the names of 24 books, all of them from his classroom library. I don't know if V read them or not. When I tried to ask questions about them, he was uncomfortable and I didn't pursue it.

On other visits to V's house other individuals would ask me for help. V's 14 year old sister often asked me to help her with her homework. For example, she would ask me to explain passages from her American History text and go over some of the assigned questions with her. Most of the work involved clarifying what the questions asked and helping her locate the material in the text. Our discussions were wide ranging, from her asking why American English sounded different from British English if the Americans had all started out speaking British English to issues of her vocational aspirations and choice of High School. During these talks V and his siblings and cousins would watch the Saturday morning wrestling matches on television or play card games.

Other requests for assistance included those from V's 21 year old cousin who needed clarification about his 1040A income tax forms. He had all of his papers together and the tax booklet, but couldn't figure out how to complete the form. After working on it with him for 20 minutes, I couldn't either and had to call my accountant for advice.

Perhaps one of the reasons it was easy for V to invite me over and for the family to have me in the house was that other English speakers came over at other times. One time I was introduced to a "friend" of V's father, an American of about 25 years of age. He was going to New York with V's father to show him the route to the airport. V's grandfather was returning from a trip to Hong Kong. I was assigned a role like the other English speakers who come to the house and was introduced as V's teacher. There were the tutors from the community and the University of Pennsylvania who worked with the school age children; English speaking friends who assisted with arrangements for medical and dental care; and others, like this "friend" who assisted with trips to the airport.

As a "teacher" and English speaker I was asked to help with school-related tasks and matters having to do with reading, writing and filling out forms. Both in V'S house, in his classroom, and in my own home (through the telephone) I was a resource, and thus there was both a ROLE and a REASON for my relationship with the family. I was also one of many resources and connections the family had with members of the English speaking community. And in noting and complying with the requests, I could learn what those requesting needed to know as they offered hospitality and the priviledge of coming into their homes.

V HELPS OTHERS One of the major findings of this research is that V and his older siblings are asked to and give a great deal of assistance to adult members of their family in understanding both written and oral English. For V at least, this extends to offers of assistance to adults outside the family and cuts across a range of contexts. In this there is continuity with behaviors observed at home and at school, and with English speakers as well as non-English speakers. That a child is assisting adults in literacy related activities can be seen as LITERACY ROLE REVERSAL. That is, the usual situation with a school age child is for the child to seek and receive help from an adult. In these families, the child is being asked to assist the adults. And in establishing helping relationships with adults the child learns a different set of interactional and literacy-related skills than children who are mostly in situations of receiving assistance.

On one of the first days that I was observing in class, V asked me what I was writing in my notebook. I told him that I was interested in the games that the children were doing during a free choice time. He volunteered to spell the names of the games to me and started, 'c-h-e-s-s', 'o-u-t-w-i-t', but then said that he would make a list of them. During the choice time he wrote down the names of the games on the shelves. When I asked him if I could keep the list, he said he would copy it over neatly and then give it to me. I noted his interest in both offering to help and in helping me with what I was doing. I was impressed with his confidence in writing and presenting a list to me, and his ability to consider what I needed. However, what I didn't realize at this time was that this was part of a much larger pattern of helping adults with literacy related tasks and that I would see this activity repeated with his parents at home on a regular basis.

While I was in the classroom V was often interested in what I was writing. (Several of the children would want to see what I was writing but would not find my notes that interesting or worth reading.) Sometimes during choice V would watch me write in my notebook and would correct me if he thought I had spelled a name wrong. For example, in writing about the ESL teacher I had not wanted to put down her full name, but chose to refer to her as Miss K. He corrected me, pointing out that I had forgotten the other letters. If I misspelled a child's name, he would provide the right spelling. My abbreviations were very confusing to him and required several detailed explanations. These offers of assistance were not limited to me, but were part of many interactions V had with his classroom teachers and the reading aid who came to the classroom. These offers of assistance were taken well. V's manner in providing a correction was more of an indication of his interest, rather than being out of place or inappropriate.

On another occasion he pointed out my miswriting of ESL and said it should be E-S-O-L since it was pronounced with the O. He did not know what the letters stood for. However, it was clear from the consistency of his behavior that offering assistance on these issues was a familiar type of social interaction with an adult.

However, from classroom observations it became clear that V's offers of assistance were not limited to adults, but extended to other members of his class. He would point out spelling errors made by both Black and Asian children and these would be well received. V was proud of his spelling ability and would ask the teacher if he could take the spelling tests of lower level groups because he wanted to see how he would do with material that he was supposed to already know. V clearly did this for himself and perhaps also to get a compliment from the teacher, but he did not show these tests off to his peers or even discuss it with them.

As I continued my research in the home, it became clear that school was not the only context in which V either offered help or was asked to help. In fact some of the most extensive assistance was given to V's parents, cousins and other relatives who were not native English speakers. I first noted this in the classroom when V gave a note to his teacher that was written by his father. He accompanied it with an extensive apology for the way the note was written and for the misspelling of the word 'lunch'. V explained that his older sister had helped his father (the note was to excuse V from school for a dental appointment), but his father had not written it correctly. V and I talked about it later, and he told me that he would often help his parents with reading and filling out forms that came from school and writing notes in English. His sister and older brother would help with these tasks as well, including dealing with materials that related to V's father's employment. V would be asked to act as a translator in conversation with his mother's employers, the people whose homes she was cleaning. He would accompany his mother on different errands to help with map reading, instructions, and reading and translating a wide range of forms, for example those used at the bank. During the time that I have been at V's house, he (and/or his older siblings) have helped their parents and older cousins to figure out and fill in a variety of forms that are school-related, job-related, medical and dental forms, permission slips, and tax or financial forms. They have had to read and translate announcements that covered a wide range of topics and are issued by a number of different institutions. All of these interactions involve a reversal of the expected roles of assistance.

Thus, V and children in his situation cannot rely on their parents as resources when it comes to direct assistance with school related tasks, such as homework and test preparation. Such assistance is also required to particpate in school trips, special programs and special prjects. They cannot get help from their kin who themselves do not speak much English and read or write even less. And as for older siblings who might have the necessary skills, they might not have the time as in the case of V's family. Children like V seek help from adults outside of their familial networks, adults that they meet at school, through church associations, community volunteers, and the occasional anthropologist. They must ask for assistance with school-related literacy tasks for themselves, as well as ask for assistance on literacy-related tasks in order to help those around them. That is, V must develop a set of strategies and personal networks for getting assistance to do his work and to get the necessary assistance to help older family members. The situation for the non-native English speaking child such as V is very different from the native English speaking child in terms of the social relationships that are necessary and must be developed to obtain assistance.

One question to come out of this research is what does it entail (and mean) to get assistance from someone who is not a family member in terms of the quality of emotional involvement and the type of assistance given. Furthermore, for a non-native English speaker, what does it mean to get assistance from someone who does not share membership in the same social group in terms of how information is organized and presented. What types of strategies of elicitation does the child develop in order to obtain the necessary information to complete an assignment or to elicit an explanation that is comprehensible given what the child already knows. How does the child develop and manage social relationships that are built on requesting assistance so as not to overburden those relationships. How does the child structure interactions to get information for him or herself as well as on behalf of others who use the child as an intermediary or translator. And finally what types of information (lexical items, special syntactic structures etc.) does the child have to understand in both of these types of exchanges (those for the child and those on behalf of others) that is different from the typical interactions English speaking children have with printed material. For the non-English speaking child, the social requirements for school success and the achievement of literacy skills are of a different nature than the social requirements for the English speaker. The development of these social skills must be viewed as part of the acquisition of literacy and literacy related skills.

## LITERACY IN THE HOME

V's home environment is one that presents some challenging data to the current debates concerning the importance of a literate environment in learning to be successful in school-based literacy related skills. In describing his home and his experiences, including those of his other siblings, I will explore selected patterns of interaction that focus on literacy-related tasks and events both at home and at school.

It would be hard to categorize V's home as a "literate" environment. In fact the very notion causes one to focus on what is absent, rather than what is present. In this section I will try to do both as I examine alternatives to extensive early bookreading (being read to and mutually attending to books) and casual reading, both of which have been a focus in descriptions of white middle class parent-child interactions.

In looking around the first floor of V's house, (the living room, dining room and kitchen), there is a notable absence of books lined up in bookcases, coffee table books, and other reading materials. There might be a folded up Chinese newspaper and a Chinese popular magazine, but little else designed for reading. There is a tape deck system with a box of cassette tapes and walls are decorated with posters of Asian movie stars, not book shelves. Located on the second floor are the bedrooms, and again, there are no books on the night tables or magazines on a rack. The television is on the second floor and there is no TV Guide.

V and his siblings all share rooms. V has a room with his older brother and in it is a bookshelf made out of an old play refrigerator. A few books, magazines and old games are piled on its shelves. The pile of old National Geographics was given to V by a neighbor who found them on the street. V says that they are too hard to read, but he sometimes looks for a picture to cut out when there is an assigned school report. There are half a dozen comic books that a teacher at school gave him and a couple of Golden Book editions of Peter Pan and Pinochio. There is a small desk by the window where V does his homework. A quarter-sized violin from school with his music books are stacked there. V says he likes to play the violin and enjoys the school lessons, but never practices at home.

V has a coffee can with an assortment of bottle caps which he has been collecting. They have letters printed inside and the collector is supposed to form the word CHALLENGE from these letters and win a prize. V says he has tried to get the right letters but has become convinced that the company does not make all of them which prevents him from winning.

V says that he likes to read and does read fiction during the daily Sustained Silent Reading time at school. However, he does not read casually at home. This is not to imply that V never uses books as a resource, but instead the following incidents are meant to indicate the ways in which V does use books and the types of books I have observed him using. For example, V and one of his friends S, (who is also Chinese from Vietnam), enjoy paperfolding, making airplanes, dragons, boxes and a variety of other objects which can be quite elaborate. They will follow the directions out of paperfolding books, and construct models based on what is given. In addition, when playing chess, another favorite activity of V's both at school with his male classmates and at home with his older siblings, V will consult a chess book when there are differences in interpretation of rules. V will also use the dictionary when doing his homework. At home V will do his school work and complete assignments, usually work sheets as required. But what I have not observed is V or his siblings casually reading fiction at home or reading novels, biographies, etc. that are not directly school related. Nor I have been able to elicit information about the casual reading of fiction or nonfiction. Reading that is task related, that is organized to present information, such as instruction booklets, seems to be central to V's concerns, rather than reading children's fiction or nonfiction.

In pursuing the issue of casual reading and adult-child interactions which are centered on looking at books and being read to, it became clear that for this family looking at books together and being read to was not an activity. In fact when asked directly if he was ever read to by his parents in Chinese from any books, he looked at me in surprise and said, "Why would they (his parents) do that?" It is also the case that no one reads in English or Chinese to V's younger siblings nor are there special books just for them. V's parents have never bought him a children's book. In fact all of the books and magazines he has were given to him by neighbors or teachers. V's parents do on occasion read Chinese novels when the children are watching television or playing.

It is difficult to know how generalizable the patterns observed in one family are. And there are considerable variations of background, social class and general situation for the population that is cover-termed 'Asian Refugee.' There is evidence that two other Asian children who were included in this study were occasionally read to at home by older siblings (in English) and it is worthwhile detailing that here because it seems like those events of being read to were in some sense 'reportable'. That is, both children either directly or indirectly in their classroom writing indicated that they had been read to. I have no examples from the writing or oral reporting of native English speakers that they were currently being read to but given that they could read, the topic was never brought up.

This was not the case for PH, a Hmong speaker and S, a Chinese speaker from Vietnam, both in the 4th grade. For her Sustained Silent Writing (SSW) assignment, PH wrote the story of Snow White. This was very different from all of her previous writing which focused on personal events and stories about her friends. The Snow White story was lengthier and more complex than her other writing and used vocabulary that she had not used elsewhere. Since it was so different I asked her about it and found out that someone had read the story to her several times over the course of several days because she liked it so much. It is not clear what the relationship was between this person and PH but it was someone who came to her house often and was Asian. She said she 'learned' the story and wrote it out for SSW. A few weeks later she wrote the story of Cinderella. This shared many stylistic features with the Snow White story, and was unlike all of her other writing. Again, someone had read her the story several times over the period of a number of days, and she wrote the story "from the way I learned it." (See attached writing samples A1 and A2).

S wrote in his SSW book about going to the library with a friend to borrow a book. In his writing he described his sister reading that book and that he loved the story. He wrote that he studied his spelling tests both in the evening and in the morning. Four days later he copied part of the story from the book into his SSW book. (See attached writing samples B1 and B2).

While V, his siblings and some of the other Asian children are not involved in frequent or extensive book reading sessions, they are all frequently read letters, letters sent by relatives written in Chinese, telling about what is happening in their lives. Reading and writing letters are an important in the lives of V and his family, and from a range of other evidence, in the lives of other Asian 'refugee' children as well. V's father reads letters from family members in Vietnam to the family, and letters are frequently exchanged, though V and his younger siblings do not write them. V told me about a tutor he had last year who helped him with homework, and since moving to California she writes to the children and they occasionally write back to her in English. In V's SSW book he wrote a story about a race car driver who receives a letter, reads it and then goes to the race and wins.

S, a Chinese boy from Vietnam, also writes about the letters he receives in his SSW book. In one case he reported getting a letter from his mother and sister, who are still in Vietnam. The letter was read to him since he doesn't read Chinese. In his SSW book he reported the contents of the letter, thus translating from Chinese into English and writing out the translation at a later time.(See attached writing sample C).

In this class children have penpals from another school with whom they regularly exchange letters. One of the items that is reported when these children write about themselves is that fact that they can speak other languages (Vietnamese, Chinese) and that they like to write and do well in spelling. That is, literacy skills often are mentioned in self-description when writing penpal letters. They are also mentioned in the SSW books when these children write stories about their relationships with each. For example, in a story that V wrote about his best friend (the Chinese boy who left his classroom) he describes his friend in the following way in the beginning of his story: "He can do math and spelling and handwriting and write very well too." The story continues in a narrative mode about their joint success in apprehending a robber. Similarly, S wrote a story about a "magic book" found by two boys who don't know how to read the magic words. They ask a man who tells them it is a magic book and they wish that they can read. The book says "your wish is my command." And they can read. They go home and tell their mother.(See attached writing sample D). Stories share the theme of the desirability of having certain literacy skills, as in the story written by V about receiving and reading a letter, and winning a car race. The theme of literacy competence does not appear in the stories written in the SSW books of the English speakers in this classroom.

Going to school is another theme that comes up in the SSW writing of these Asian children. For example PH wrote a story about a girl who did not want to go to school and went out to play instead. When she came home her mother spanked her and she cried. The next day she went to school and her mother and father were very happy. (See attached writing sample E).

There is no mention of these types of themes in the writing of the English speakers. But for these Asian children literacy skills and school are topic worthy for their writing. They are issues and concerns of these children in a way that is different from the English speakers. What this suggests is that the writing produced by these children refers to literacy-related tasks and skills and is a source to be examined for what is can tell us about the ways in which these children may be considering these tasks and skills. These writing documents are also a source for assessing the literacy and writing skills of these children as they evolve during the years, a project in progress.

Certain literacy skills are frequently used by these Asian children as part of building and maintaining their social relationships with others, particularly adults. Letters were written and cards with messages were often created and sent to various school staff (principal, assistant principal, and office staff), teachers and the ethnographer. Cards were sent for Christmas, New Years, and Valentines day. These cards were often elaborate and made with school materials at home. For example, S's card to me on Valentines Day read as follows:

HAPPY VALENTINE DAY
TO: BAMBI FROM: S-----
DEAR BAMBI
I WISH YOU AND YOUR HUSBUN A HAPPY
VALENTINE AND I WISH YOU HAVE A LOT OF
VALENTINE PRESENT. L♡VE
S-----

V's card for Christmas was store bought and had a hand-written message inside:

DeAr:
Bambi,
I Wish you a Merry chirstmAs And A happy New yeAr.
LoVe,
V----
have fun
From:
V-----L--
December 24
1981

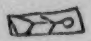
The envelope was also addressed. Considering the range of these children's literacy skills, their letterwriting (both the penpal letters to children in other schools and letters to English-speaking adults) demonstrated a competence about form, addressee-appropriateness, and message- appropriateness. One can only speculate how much they have learned about this genre from their extensive exposure to letters that come from their overseas relatives and how letters are one way to exchange information and build social relationships. This invites comparison with the experiences and competencies of the English speakers but at this point in the research that comparison is premature.

One also wonders about the continuity between two important genres in the lives of these Asian children, letters and forms (the medical, dental, school etc forms that these children spend time comprehending and translating for their parents). Both are INFORMATION oriented and are designed to convey information and to be read for specific information. The instruction booklets also of interest to some of these children seem to be part of a piece in describing one aspect of literacy skills, skills that are built on a pragmatic type of information. These skills are related to those necessary in translating and conveying information from Chinese to English and back, and from English (oral and written) into Chinese, another important communication skill that these children develop. Their language and literacy skills in turn link their parents and older relatives with the English speaking world.

The skills that these children develop must be seen as contextualized in their social relationships and social life. They are developed within the sociocultural context of their families and must deal with the sociocultural context of their new society, the United States. One wonders how far reaching Literacy Role Reversal is in terms of other important areas of social life. Our usual model of socialization is that the adult socializes the child and transmits important cultural knowledge in order that the child may become a member of a particular social group. That is of course happening for these children. But there is an additional point to keep in mind for this immigrant population: the child with his or her language and literacy skills in English transmits important cultural knowledge about the new culture to the parents, and thus can be seen as a socializing agent as well. For this particular population, the Chinese from Vietnam, this reciprocal relationship is encouraged. In terms of assistance children may be on the GIVING as well as on the RECEIVING end. It seems that these particular cultural values are adaptive in that information is translated and exchanged and family members can benefit from a wide range of institutional services including education.

Furthermore, in order to understand the observed behaviors of any social group we have to know what literacy means for a given people. We have to understand which genres are seen as appropriate to master at different points in time, and especially for immigrant populations we have to explore the ways in schooling and different aspects of literacy are related. And, as seen from the results of this initial report, developing and maintaining relationships of assistance and devising strategies of resource use may be one of the key factors for achieving success in a number of critical social arenas.

Writing sample A1



walt Disney's
snow white
and the sevan DWARFS

Once upon a time a queen say by the window she said if I have a daughter I will name her snow white and she say by the window sewing As she worked she thought if only I had a little daughter how happy I woule be. and when she dead she have a Daughter so she Love her Daughter so she name her snow white. and when she dead. snow white Father got a new Queen she was mene and bad.

she away time snow white to work. when snow white work she sing so the bird will come and liscten to snow white. the Queen is so mean and bad she said kill snow white. but the man did not kill snow white. so snow white look for a house and she saw a house. she go in the seven Dwarfs came they said who came here and eat are food. some one is up in are bedRoom lets go up and see who is in are bed. they Look and they saw a girl. snow white got up and snow white said who are you said snow white. and they said we are the seven Dwarfs. snow white said can I live with you said snow white sure said the seven DWARFS. snow white was so happand happy. the Queen said mirror mirror on the wall who the fairest of us all: snow whit is the fairest on the wall. the Queen was so mene and she Poison the apple and Queen turn it to a old wome, and seven Dwarfs said do not open the door for the stranger so the seven DWARFS said good-by but snow white was not care and a old weme came here the apple for you snow white said thank you said snow white. and snow toot a bite. and she fell on the floor and the seven DWARFS came and they open the door and they saw snow white lay on the floor.

and then oneday a Prince came and saw snow white and than he asked the seven DWARFS what is her name and the seven DWARFS said her name is snow white the Prince said she is so Pretty said the Prince and the seven DWARFS said she is Pretty and the Prince said let me kiss her if she will wake up and the Prince kiss her and she wake up and the seven DWARFS was so happy and happy and the Prince and snow white got marry. and the Queen said mirror mirror on the wall who the fairest of us all snow white is the Queen was so mad and she went to dance she is dead. the end

Writing sample A2

1 (1)

one day tte was a girl her name
was cinderella and cinderella has two
stepsister. one is stepsiste one and others
is stepsiste two and cindere stepmother.
cinderella stepmother was so mene
she said cinderella was the beautiful
girl and cinderella stepmother tell
cinderella to work and and King send
note to go to the ball cinderella
stepmother mother daughliter come
Look at this note the King send
this note to was. stepmother said
daughliter get dress. stepsister one
cinderella help me get dress
sister two: mama help me first.
cinderella: ok I will help you
sister. sister two now help me
on my hat here sister
can I put on you hts and be quick [illegible]

2 2

cinderella is all alone and she
makes a sad face. and cinderella
faify God mothe: came she said
cinderella you will go yo
the ball. Cinderella said who
are you. cinderella faify God mother
said I'm your faify godmother.
cinderella faify god mother: said
I need six white mice and
a big rond pumpkin. and cinderella
got the six white mice and a big
rond punpkin. and cinderella
faify Godmother said six white
mice turn mice turn into something
nice! turn turn six white horses!
punpkin punpkin Big and rond
turn turn without a Sound—
into a coach! now cinderella you
may go to the ball.

But my dress How can I go
to the ball in this dirty an
old dress. the dress oh
yes the dress said fairy God[illegible]
dress dress dirty and old
can turn into a dress of gold.
But now You must have some
magic! glass slippers, too.
cinerella said magic more magec
fairy Godmother said and here
they are now cinerella You
may go to the ball.
You will be more beautiful
than anyone there.
But tell on one Your name!
and be back at midnight
remember! be back at midnight

stepsister one well, here
we are But no one is even
looking al was they are
lookint the Jirl in the dress of
gold stepsister two. tell me
your name. ding dond is
midnight. the Prince said
wait. cinerella I must not tell
You my name Goodby.
[illegible] my

cinerella stepsister came home
stepsister one. cinerella cinerella
come here. the Prince is at
the door. cinerella go away and
get to work stepsister one your
foot is to big let me try one
your feet is to big the prince is
there no one here

stepsiste one yes Just a girl the Prince let her try on stepsiste two cinerella cinerella come here- the Prince said try this on is this the one yes it is the one you you are my Princess!

Cinerella
Cinerella

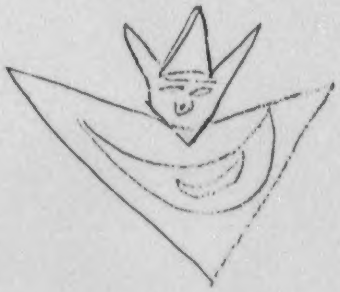
January 11

one day there was a girl her name is robin and robin mom said you will go to the store with me and robin said mom I am not going. and robin mother said come on robin mother said robin you go to go with me robin said o.k. and they come home robin said mom can I go to my friend house and she said yes you may go to your friend house and robin said thank you mom and robin said good-by mom and robin go to her friend house and her friend open the door →

november 5,

on this saturday e mybe go to play
roller skate with my sister and my
sister friend yesterden my sister ask
me do you no how to play roller skate
if you no how to play rolloe skate
then e take you go to play roller skate
then e say e no how to play rollor
skate a little bit can you take me go
to play roller skate ok maybre e take
you go to play roller skate

the end



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Writing sample B1

november, 16, 1981

yesterlay e went to the library with my
friend and e borrow one book from the
library and the name of the book Is
the king of the golden river. and my
sister read for me to heard that
story and e love that story. then
my sister read that book finish
the sister. then e study my spelling
tests. then at morning e study my
spelling tests again.

the end

novemebe, 9, 19

on saturday e watched bruce lee in chanel 29 and yesterday e watched movie on 21st and e like the film on 21st and e see sia and e see my friend in the movie at 21st one [illegible] fight and one is love story and the first film and e hate the second film.

the end

---

Writing sample B2

november, 13, 1981

the king of the golden river

In a secluded and mountainous part of stiria, there was, in old times, a Valley of the most surprising and luxuriant fertility. It was surrounded, on all sides, by steep and rocky mountains, rising into peaks, which were always covered with snow, and from which a number of torrents descended in constant cataracts. One of these fell westward, over the face of a crag so high, that, when the sun had set to everything else, and all below was darkness his beams still shone full upon this waterfall, so that it locked like a shower of gold.

the end

Writing sample C

november,3, 19

yesterday i got my mom's letter in vietnam
and i got film in the letter my sister
say do you have fun in american and
he say you remember to write letter
to send the letter for me and mom
and my mom and my sister say
me remember you and [illegible]
sister and your father so much x

the end

---

november,4,1981

my friend was tell me a story about
him in vietnam he say his was see
a ghost in vietnam then another day he
go to play with he friend again and
he went out to play with his friend and with
his bother then his bother say is to
dark out here can we go home now
the he say ok then his friend say
if you go home i still stay here then
he go home but his friend still stay
there then his friend wak alone then
next day morning then his friend come
to my friend house then his friend say
last night i was see a ghost x

the end

inside out Dec, 23, 1981

Mather Dog and Fathe Dog had two little dogs named OUT and IN. "It is time for bed," said Mother Dog. "where are out and IN?" "out is in and IN is out," siad Father Dog. "No, I am in," said IN. "It is out who is out." "IN, please go out and bring out in." said Mother Dog. As soon as In was out out came in. "New Out is in, and In is out" said Father Dog. "I'll get In," said Out. yo are in," said Fathe Dog "It is In who is out!" "I out and I am in," said out. "But I, Out, am going out to get In in." "It is all too much for m," said Father Dog. Where was In at the end of the story? Where was out?

the ent.

Great story!

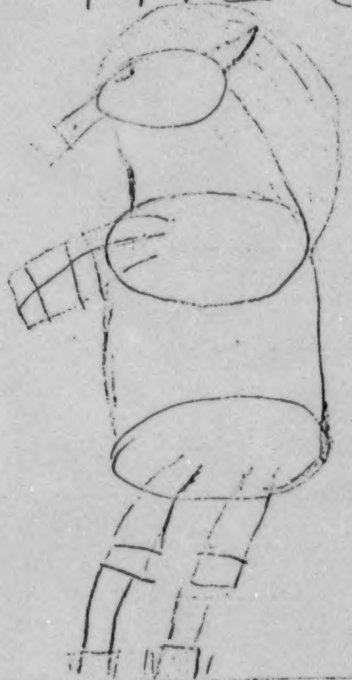
the magic book January, 5, 1981

once up on a time, There was a boy. the boy was named peter, Peter went out to play. with his friend. his friend named Joe, then Joe and Peter walk then Peten and Joe find a magic book then Peten and Joe look in side of the book. then they don't know how to read. the magic words. then they go to aske the man. the man said this book is a magic book. then they wish they can read. then the book said your wish is my command. then they can read.

V

then they went home. they said to there mom I can read mom.

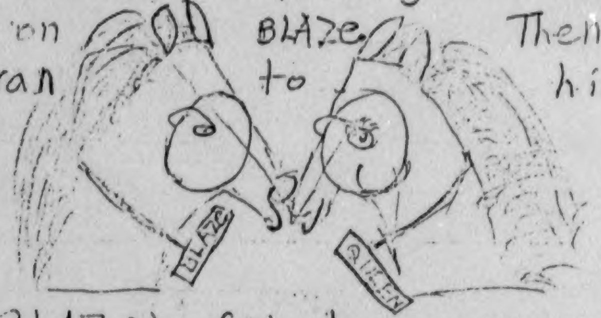
# the end



## Chapter I

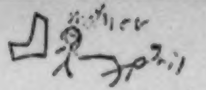
January 1:

once upon a time. There was a horse. The horse named BLAZE. He walked in the woods. Then BLAZE saw a boy. The boy can not talk, The boy named PETER. Then PETER sit on BLAZE. Then PETER ride home. Then PETER mother said. Where did you get that horse? PETER tried to tell his mother he find the horse. Then next mornings. PETER ride on BLAZE. Then BLAZE ran to his friend.



BLAZE's friend was named QUEEN.

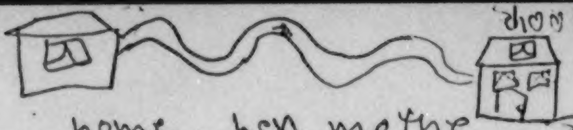
Writing sample E



oneday there was a girl and her father and mother.

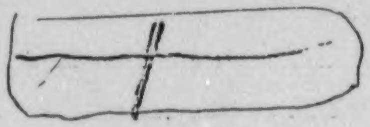
oneday a girl have to go to school she said mom can I go to my friend house her mother said no you have to go to school and the girl said no I don't want to go to school her mother said no you have to go. But the girl did not want to go to school.

and her mother said if you don't go to school I will spank you on your behind and the girl said no mom I will go to school if you don't spank me no my behind. and her mother said ok go to school But she did not go to school she away go to play. and when she come



home her mothe spank her no her behind and she was cry. and then to tomorrow she said mom Good-by I'm going to school and her mother and father was so happy

the end



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# LITERACY IN THE JOHNSON AND KRUMSHANK FAMILIES:
# TWO CASE STUDIES

Monroe Watkins

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## METHODOLOGY

### Setting and Selection of Participants

The participants in this study are two families whose children attend Shortridge Elementary School in West Philadelphia. Both of the families live in the immediate school community. For this particular study, entry and establishing rapport were not problems since I had known all of the children and both sets of parents from a previous study. (Ethnographic Monitoring of Children's Acquisition of Reading/Language Arts Skills In and Out of the Classroom, Dell H. Hymes, Principal Investigator, supported by National Instititute of Education.)

When chosen for participation, in the study alluded to above, the children in these two families were characterized by teachers in the school as "typical" of the children who attended Shortridge. They were not seen as either particularly outstanding or as problems. The children and the parents were eager to participate in the study and readily opened their homes and their lives to me.

### Data Collection

Data for this study were collected over ten months from February through December, 1981. They were drawn from home observations, interviews with parents and children, journals that were kept by the children themselves during summer months, through attendance at church with the family, and through participation in a variety of other family activities. In addition to observing and participating in these normal daily activities, I also had the unique opportunity to work with the children, their parents, several relatives and friends in tutoring sessions organized by the parents and conducted by myself during the fall teacher's strike. This experience is described in a section of the report.

A regular pattern was established of visiting each home twice a week with each visit lasting from one to three hours. The visits were arranged so that a variety of family activities could be observed. I made sure, for example, to spend some time with the children immediately after school, other days I went in the early evening, on still other occasions I visited with them on Saturday mornings. The most relaxed time to talk and collect interview data turned out to be Sunday evenings. In all cases the convenience of the family was the prime consideration in deciding when and how long to visit.

As an experiment, I asked Ann and Tom, both children who participated in the study, if they would keep daily journals for a while recording in so far as they could everything that happened to them during the day that they saw as important. Ann kept hers faithfully for four weeks and Tom for six weeks. They turned out to be rich sources of insight about the activities for the students and suggested topics to be followed up through interview and observation. In addition, of course, they were useful literacy artifacts in their own right.

## THE JOHNSONS

### Parents

Sam and Mary Johnson, parents of Sam Jr. and Ann, are in their late thirties and have lived in the community for eight years. Both their families migrated to Philadelphia from Birmingham, Alabama, during the early forties. Their families were among a number of Black families moving from the South to northern cities in search of a better life. Mary, her mother, three sisters and a brother all live in the Philadelphia area. Sam has four brothers living in the area but his mother moved back to Alabama in the sixties. They have many relatives still living in the South and go back to visit every two years.

This year Mary is working as a paid part-time aide at Shortridge. For the past three years she was active as a parent volunteer. Her duties include working in the library and tutoring students in the first grade who are experiencing reading difficulties. In addition to working and keeping house, she finds time to work with parent groups selling candy and coming out to other fund raising activities. She is a very good seamstress and is regularly commissioned by the school to make costumes for school plays, cheerleading, etc.

Sam works in the produce department of a food processing plant filling commercial orders for restaurants, hospitals, schools, and other business concerns. His job entails quite a bit of writing, mostly in filling out orders. Sam is a good carpenter and has done a professional looking job of remodeling their home. He occasionally uses this skill to earn extra money by working for people in and out of the neighborhood.

Both Sam and Mary completed their education through high school. Sam attended an art school under the G.I. Bill after returning from service. Although he stopped because of burgeoning family responsibilities, he still loves to draw in his spare time. He has contemplated going back to school many times to perfect his skill in drawing but keeps putting it off. Mary says that she would like to go back to school as well but is beginning to feel that she is too old. When the kids came along she had very little time and, furthermore, they could not have afforded it.

Mary is known to go to teachers in the school for help when she does not know how to an assignment that the children bring home. She says, "I know that they (teachers) get tired of seeing me coming, but if I am to help my children, I have to know how to hlep." Because she is known to find out about assignments in the different classes, the teachers solicit her to help correct papers when she is free.

Sam Jr.

Sam Jr. is a very energetic 9 year old fourth grader. Sam is a very good student in school, even though his mother feels that she has to "stay on him" about his school work. Sam has a reputation for mischief around the house while his father is at work, leading his mother to threaten to "kill" his total "soul" if he doesn't settle down. She affectionately warns him that the "devil" is going to cart him away body and soul. His frequent bickering with his sister about television programs or his threats to tie her up and sic his trained imaginary monsters on her gets him sent upstairs to his room to wait for his father to get home and finish "killing" him. He typically will go up and stay for about fifteen minutes then steal back down.

Sam Jr. loves to play outside after his work is finished or to go down stairs to the basement where there are a variety of games to play in addition to his Star War's collection. He enjoys television, and his favorite programs are Dance Fever, The Jeffersons, Sandford and Son, WKRP Cincinatti, Happy Days and all cartoons on Saturday morning.

Sam Jr. likes to read Dr. Seuss books, books about monsters (dracula, space monsters) and Hardy Boys mysteries. He owns a library card, however, most of the books that he reads during the year are checked out from the school library. Sm Jr. owns a variety of children's books that were bought for him by his parents or were gifts received for birthdays and other holidays and he won a trophy for the most books read during one summer program.

In an interview Sam told the researcher that he loves school and thinks that it is important because "you need an education to get a good job!" He thinks that if you can't read people will "rip you off" and take your money. He feels that he has a good teacher and that he can tealk to her if he has a problem.

In his spare time, Sam writes short stories about his Star War collections and about Werewolves.

### Ann

Sam's sister Ann, a relatively quiet young lady of 13 who is in the eighth grade, does well in school. She rarely needs help with her homework unless it is a special project, or if it has to do with geometry or drawing, in which case her father is able to help her. If the assignments are more complex, the mother will help her search for answers or materials that are needed. She appears to enjoy arguing in a friendly kind of way with her mother and brother. These arguments usually are about the TV with her brother and about going outside and the telephone with her mother. She and her father are good "buddies". Even though she does well in school, she says that she hates school and finds it boring. She has a library card but swears that she "hates" reading. Yet, she loves to read Jet, Ebony, teen magazines, and the comic strips in the newspaper. She likes television and her favorite shows are What's Happening, a dance show, and Happy Days. She is allowed to practice gymnastics after school and is on the cheering squad at school. She used to write songs but states that she rarely writes them anymore; however, she writes daily in her diary.

She thinks that homework has no value except to keep children busy after school. Even though she considers school boring, her feelings are that one needs an education to get a job. In observing her at school she only responds when asked a question. The teacher thinks of her as a wonderful "child". Ann has very few problems at school, and feels that she communicates well with all of her teachers. Her mind changes frequently about going to college. At times Ann thinks she would like to be a fashion designer when she grows up. Her best friend lives in the same neighborhood and goes to the same church. Her three cousins (girls) visit a lot on the weekend because her mother does not allow her to play outside very much.

## THE HOME

The Johnsons live in a row house on a very narrow street. The street is clean and free of garbage and the homes on this street are well kept. There are no abandoned houses on this street in contrast to many other streets in the neighborhood.

As you walk up the steps you can read the name Johnson through the screen, on the nameplate. The bell is the push type located in the center of the door. One enters directly into the living room. To the right as you enter is a large walnut bookcase with a variety of games (Maniac, Dragon, Melody Madness, Backgammon, and Dominoes), a stereo component, tape deck set and tapes of television programs that Sam has recorded with his video tape machine. Straight ahead leads to the upstairs. Over to the left of the door is a large gray sofa sitting next to the window with a coffee table directly in front of it. On the wall to the west of the room is a large picture with early century designs on it. On each side of the picture is a picture of a lion that depicts a coat-of-arms. The television sits in the middle of the room on the west side. On the right of the TV is the fireplace. The upper part of the fireplace is done in sumulated rock. Over on the right of the fireplace and the open entrance that leads to the kitchen, is a large soft easy chair. This is where Mary normally sits during my visit. The only other chair in the room was bought by Sam at his job because it is sturdy enough to hld his 290 pounds. Mary has made four large pillows to lay on the hardwood floor for the children to relax on while they watch televsion or other family activities. The lighting for the living room is produced by two large lamps and one ceiling light.

Sam has decorated the dining room. The left wall of the dining room is completely mirrored over with glass. Beams have been installed in the top of the ceiling and stained a dark walnut. In the center of the room is a huge dining table that seats six people. In front of the center wall is a large hutch that holds a fine set of china. Over on the right side of the room is an entrance that leads into a small kitchen.

Directly in front of the center back wall of the kitchen is an oven, sink, and refrigerator. On the wall by the hutch is a telephone. There are no visible pad or pencil where messages can be taken. To the right of the entrace to the kitchen is a door that leads to the basement.

The basement is Sam and Sam Jr.'s pride and joy even though the rest of the family uses it. Sam has installed wallpaper around the wall which depicts beautiful pastoral scenes. There is a regulation pool table, in the center of the floor directly in front of the bottom is a larger table that Sam has constructed for Sam Jr.'s Star War collection. To the left of the table is a shelf Sam constructed to hold his old movies, old records, and comic books that he has collected for years. Standing beside this shelf is Sam's screen and small table for his projector on which he shows Sam Jr. and his friends old western movies that date back to the early forties and fifties. Sam has built a bench that extends along the est wall for children to sit on while they watch movies; on the back wall behind the pool table are shelves that hold games, toys, and a variety of old magazines (Look, Saturday Evening Post). To the right side of the pool table is a shelf that holds a stereo component, tapes, and records. The washer and dryer are located directly under the steps that lead to the basement.

At the bottom of the stairs that lead to the bedroom upstairs (all sleeping quarters are upstairs) on the right wall are portraits of immediate family. There is a group picture of Mary and Sam and the kids, and individual school pictures of the kids. There is a picture of Mary's younger sister.

A quick perusal of the sleeping quarters gives an insight into the importance that literacy holds in the family's life. Furniture and lighting are arranged so books can be read or letters written in bed while relaxing. In Sam Jr.'s room, across the hall from his parents, is a bed, desk, lamp, bureau and a small bookcase for his books. Scattered around the room are numerous toys (trucks, balls, small cars, etc.) A list of books on the book shelf includes:

Whistle for Willie
Janice and the Giant
Lassie
Caps for Sale
All Year Long
My House
The Night Before Christmas
Count and See
Arthur's Honey Bear
My Little Book of Horses
About Animals
Mother Goose
Go to School
The Snowy Day
Bed Time for Frances
Morris Has a Cold
Go Fly a Kite

There is a large supply of comic books on the shelf and the floor. On top of his desk is a pencil holder with two pictures in it and three little men from his Star Wars collection. Sam Jr.'s room is basically neat and tidy although Mary has a hard time trying to get him to keep it clean.

Ann's room, located next to Sam Jr.'s room, is bigger than Sam Jr.'s. To the left as you walk into the room is a clothes closet which is kept very neat. The clothes are hung in order and the shoes are lined neatly across the closet floor. Ann's bed is located to the left of the closet with the bureau at the foot of her bed. There is a small desk in front of the window that was purchased at a yard sale. To the right of the desk is a book shelf that holds Ann's books. Some books on the shelf are hers and others belong to the library. The list includes:

Holy Bible
Wind in the Willows
Under the Lilacs
Salomon and Sheba
Sleeping Beauty
Afro-Americans in U.S. History
The Wonderful Wizard of Oz
Bees, Bugs and Beetles
Dorrie and the Halloween Plant
Dictionary

A variety of games were observed in Ann's room. She says that she and Sam Jr. play some of them together when she is not angry with him. At other times, she shares the games with friends. Some of the games observed were: Uno - a numbers card game that can be played by five or six people; Match Two - has to do with American history; and Scrabble - a word game.

There are a wide variety of literacy artifacts in the home and they are utilized by all members of the family. Ann and Sam Jr. were observed playing Uno together and Ann plays a lot of Backgammon and Scrabble with Mary. The Daily News is delivered every day. Mary and Sam read it mostly for local news and the kids for the funnies. The encyclopedias are used for school assignments and the Ebonys and Jets are read by Ann and her mother to keep up with the news in the black community as well as to collect recipes.

## CHURCH

Religion and the church is a very important part of the Johnson's life. The family is Baptist and attends church regularly. The church they attend, Vine Memorial, is located on the fringes of the school community. The kids attend Sunday school regularly. One of Mary's sisters and several members of the "extended family" (cousins, aunt of the family, etc.) belong to this church. Mary and her sister sing on one of the church's choirs. Mary's choir travels to New York, Maryland, Virginia, South Carolina and North Carolina for singing engagements. A lot of the travel is done during the summer months when the children are out of school. However, the children rarely accompany Mary on these trips. She says that this is a time for them to get to know their daddy. In addition to attending Sunday school, the children attend a six week Bible school during the summer months.

The church hosts a variety of activities for the children. Sam and Ann are very pleased about some of them. One activity from the Bible School that generated a lot of excitement was a context to see who could name all the books of the Bible for a five dollar prize. Ann, her cousin, and Sam Jr. were contestants. Ann won one of the $5.00 prizes. When the researcher arrived at the Johnson home prior to the contest he found quite a stir. I arrived around 5:30 PM and was greeted at the door by Sam Jr.: "Hi, Mr. M., Ann and Suzy (cousin) think they gonna win five dollars tonight." Mary, her sister, Mary's three nieces, Ann and Junior were all sitting in the living room.

Junior: Momma, I want to go to the Gallery and spend my five dollars that I am going to win tonight.

Mary: Junior, you know that you haven't picked up that Bible all day. You be playing outside all day.

Junior: But I study them outside (with a slight grin on his face).

Ann: Come on, Boy, and say them if you know them with your lying self. (Everyone in the room laughs.)

Junior walks toward the center of the room as if he is getting ready to recite. He gets to the front of the room and pulls out a piece of paper and begins reciting.

Junior: Genesis, Shortridge. (Junior begins to laugh and everyone else doubles up with laughter.)

Ann: I told you he was crazy, Momma. Make him shut up. (Junior runs from the front of the room laughing.)

Mary: Ann, you name them. (Ann hesitates and then names all of them. Everyone in the family applaudes.)

Mary: You missed one. (Ann hesitates and names the missing book which was Proverbs.)

Mary's sister: (to her daughter) Shirley, do you know yours? (Shirley shakes her head.)

Sister: How come you don't? All you want to do is play. You better not get up there and make me shame. (They all laugh.)

Mary: It is almost time for Y'all to go. Junior! Come and read your prayer for Aunt Willa. (Junior comes to the front of the room and reads a prayer taken from the Book of Psalms. Everyone claps for Junior. Junior hams it up by bowing to all sections of the room.)

Mary's sister: Girl (to Mary), I have to tell you this story then we got to go. This little boy at church last night was so funny. In one of the classes they showed him a picture of Jesus. He said 'Who is

> that on that picture?' When someone said 'Jesus', the boy said 'That looks like my uncle.' (Everyone in the room appeared to laugh uncontrollably.)

Mary told her sister she was crazy and that she should stop making up tall talkes. When the children and her sister were ready to leave she told Ann: "You better win." And to Junior: "I am going to kill you if you go up there acting the fool." Junior told Mary: "I am going home with Aunt Willa and spend the night." Mary told him that he could not because "...you have summer homework to do." (This homework was given as a summer assignment by the school so that the children don't play all summer according to the teacher.)

The scene described is typical of those observed over the summer. Ann and Junior were expected to read the bible and bible study book to answer questions and be active participants. Likewise the children are expected to read and review Sunday scool lessons on Saturday night for Sunday's lesson.

## ROUTINES

The atmosphere in the Johnson family home could be described as hectic, lively and loving. Hectic, because everyone seems to always be involved in some activity or going to work. Lively, because the family, especially the children, make sure that there is never a dull moment. Loving, because they share and do a lot of things together.

Mary appears to be responsible for the daily routine of the family, the general run of the house, and the educational activities. Sam's responsibilities lie in the area of being the main provider, "enforcer" of the rules that have been set up by both he and Mary, repairs around the house and to do "eighty percent of the cooking".

### The Week-day

The week-day schedule begins, according to Mary, with Ann getting up at 6:30 and using the bathroom, followed by Sam at 7:00, then Sam Jr. and Mary. The children normally eat cold cereal for breakfast and fix their own. Mary gets up and cooks hot breakfasts for the family if it is extremely cold in the morning. Sam leaves for work around 7:30 and does not return until 7:30 at night because the family needs his overtime pay. Ann leaves at 7:45 because she has to catch the bus to school. Sam Jr.'s friend "Big Eye" comes by the house about 8:00 for a quick game of pool before he and Mary leave for school at 8:15. The school is about a fifteen minute walk from their home. Mary and Sam Jr. return home around 3:00. Junior watches the Bugs Bunny show until 4:00 at which time he has to start his homework with Mary's aid.

Homework is normally done at the kitchen table if the work is very difficult for Sam Jr. to do. If the work is not too difficult, Sam Jr. will lie down in the middle of the floor and do it. Junior does not adhere strictly to any time limit in completing his work unless Mary pushes him hard. He always keeps some small car or men from his Star War collection to play with while doing his work. The television is not allowed on while his homework is in process.

One visit is typical. On this particular day, I arrived at the Johnson home around 3:30. Mary asked me in and inquired about me and my family. She says that when she has time she "loves to watch the soap operas". Junior is upstairs watching television. It is nearing 4:00 o'clock.

> Mary: Junior, time for you cut that television off. (Junior does not answer and the television continues blaring.)
>
> Mary: You don't want me to come up those stairs do you, Boy?
>
> Junior: I'm coming soon as I git my book. (Mary tells the researcher that he is "lying", that he is trying to wait until the program goes off. Mary makes a noise as if she is going up the stairs to get him. The television goes off.)
>
> Junior: (yelling) I'm coming, I'm coming.
>
> Mary: You better come. (Junior walks slowly down the stairs with his book bag and heads to the kitchen table. Mary cuts the television off and heads to the dining table.
>
> Mary: What do you have to do today?
>
> Junior: My spelling words and read to you.
>
> Mary: You don't have math homework?
>
> Junior: We did that at school.
>
> Mary: Say your words.
>
> Junior: Some made se.... (Junior is struggling with the word search.)
>
> Mary: That word is search.

After the words have been pronounced. Junior is told to make sentences out of the word. Junior makes up sentences and reads them to Mary. After he finishes this assignment, he reads a paragraph out of his reading book.

Ann arrives home about this time, says hello and goes upstairs to her room. Mary states that she goes straight to her room when she gets home and does her homework. She rarely needs help. "Even if she did I couldn't help her!", indicates Mary. After Junior finishes he goes to the refrigerator and pulls out a candy bar.

> Mary: Put it back! Put it back! You try to eat up all the candy as soon as it comes into this house. Go on downstairs and play. You had one when you got home. (Junior goes downstairs with his perpetual smile on his face.)
>
> Mary: That boy is a trip. You heah me. He didn't have a lot of work to do today. Sometimes it takes until 6:00. (It is now 5:10. It took about forty-five minutes to do the homework.)

The homework of the children is Mary's responsibility.

> Mary: Sam comes home, eat, and lays down. I do all the helping with the homework 105% of the time. You have to look at his point of view. He leaves before the children get up. He comes in, he's tired from working on the job all day long. You can't depend on him coming in helping the kids with their homework. So the best time he will work with them is on Saturday and Sunday. If I tell him Sam Jr. has been acting in the classroom, he will get him and finish him on Saturday. He will make him stay in his room and he can't come out until he does his work.

Most of the time when Sam arrives home the family has already eaten or will wait until he prepares something that he has brought home. Mary says that it's difficult to prepare and have dinner together during the week because the family doesn't know when to expect him. They eat all meals together on the weekend.

Sam does all of the grocery shopping. Mary rarely goes to the supermarket unless Sam is out of town and this does not happen often. Virtually all of the family's activities are centered around the home. Television and playing games with the children are the most common. If she doesn't play a game with one of the children, Mary may go upstairs and sew. She reads the Daily News but only local news and to see what movies are playing. Her only regular break in the routine is her Wednesday evening choir rehearsal.

After Sam finishes dinner or finishes cooking, the children vie for his attention. This may result in an argument between Junior and Ann. They are quickly quieted down by Sam. They respond much quicker to Sam than Mary. Mary threatens a lot without following through. She has been observed throwing a shoe at Junior without really trying to hit him.

If Sam is in a good mood and not too tired he may show the family some of his old movies that he has collected or he may put one of the new moviews that he has purchased that will play on Betamax Home Video receiver that was his Christmas present to himself. Sam knows about every major western and its stars that were made during the 40's and 50's. He owns some of the great classics such as Shane, Fast Train from Gun Hill, Gunfight at OK Corrall, The Sheepman, Big Country, Magnificent Seven, Warlock, and Proud Rebel. (He owns a variety of old Mickey Mouse and other Walt Disney films and occasionally shows them to Junior's class in school.) He shoots pool with Junior on occasion, whowing off the play room he built so that they would have something do do.

Mary says that the kids watch about four hours of television daily. They watch a variety of programs; however, Mary demands that they watch certain programs. Some of those programs were Roots, Scared Straight - a program that depicted life in prison where inmates to scare first time offenders into going straight, Marian Rose White - a young girl committed to a mental institution by mistake because she couldn't hear, Marva Collins - a Black teacher who developed her own school in Illinois, and any other program that seems to have some meaning for them. Sam is more prone to watch just about anything that is entertaining. Evening programs before prine time that the children watch are: the Jeffersons, What's Happening, and Sandford and Son. Local news on channel six is looked at at 6:00 and national news is normally watched by Sam if he is home by 6:30.

Sam is much more up on national affairs than Mar. He and I, over the duration of the project, spent a good bit of time in discussions of international issues. Sam and Mary rarely insist that the children watch the news, however Junior will ask a qeustion about an event or his fathe will say, "See that, Junior, this didn't happen when I was a kid. You kids don't know how lucky you are."

The children are expected to be in bed by 9:00. Sam and Mary retire shortly after. They would stay up later if I extended my visit. Also the kids are allowed to stay up later if Mary's isster and her kids are over.

### The Weekend and Vacation

The weekend, according to Mary, is a time to get in the "streets". She and the children and her sister and children go shopping, skating, or to the movies if they have the money. Mary says that when she gets paid she takes the kids to whatever movie they want to see and to the Gallery where she buys whatever foods they want. There is an occasional trip to the museum or zoo depending on the weather. Sam meanwhile is doing the grocery shopping or resting. The whole family may take a ride together on Sunday after church and dinner or visit other family members. They do more things together as a family during the summer months because Sam gets home earlier.

Mary's family holds a reunion every year in a different city. So far the family has visited Cleveland, St. Louis, Williamsburg, North Carolina, Charleston, South Carolina, and this year it will be held in California. They are not sure that they can raise the moeny because it is so far and expensive unless all members chip in and charter a bus. Sam Jr. and Ann go and visit Sam's mother in Birmingham, Alabama, for two weeks every summer. Mary says that it is educational for them, the reunions and trips to grandmother, and so that she and Sam can get some rest.

In order to afford some of the activities for the family, they have to watch every penny and plan everything far in advance. The overtime that Sam earns plus some of Mary's salary is put aside for these activities. Most of them are centered around the children with Mary only having her choir which costs very little, Sam rewards himself by picking up a tape occasionally.

## ASPIRATIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARD SCHOOL

Sam and Mary are not sure about the aspiration that they have for their children beyond high school partly because of their limited resources. They state that they will push very hard for them to finish high school. After graduation they are not sure. Ann, at this point, wants to be a fashion designer while Junior is not sure. Mary and Sam do not see any drastic change in their financial status. The school system may lay Mary off at any time depending on the availablility of funds. Sam's company has laid off as many as can be and still conduct a viable business. They hope that they are training their children to be independent enough to reach their goal if the parent can't afford college or trade schools. They realize that the children will need more than a high school diploma in this technological age, according to Sam.

Sam and Mary are generally pleased about the children's school. Mary works at the school and is very involved. Ann is transferring out of Shortridge next year. As stated previously, Mary volunteered a lot of her time at the school before she was hired as an aide. Although Sam and Mary think the school is good, Mary feels that some of the teachers don't care about the kids and are quick to blame the parents for their inadequacies.

> Mary: Some teachers are like human beings here. They'll write you a letter, make a phone call, and tell you what is going on. (However) they (teachers) complain that parents are not spending enough time with their kids or helping them read. Well, what are their duties? Aren't their duties to teach those kids to read? How can you promote one child all the way thorugh school and he can't write? They don't care. I guess that it is on the parents shoulders. You understand, teacher does no wrong. Everything is the parents fault. The child turn out gay, it is the parents fault. If the kid doesn't like school, something is wrong at home. How does the teacher know? Do they go to those people's homes and talk to them and try and find out what is going on? Do they ask the child why he doesn't like school? No, they reach their own conlcusions.

Mary feels that the accusations that are made against parents in most cases are not true and that policies regarding homework are contradictory. The confusion stems from the fact that parents don't know whether the teachers expect them to help with homework or just check it.

> Mary (after attending a parent tea): They were discussing at school that we were supposed to check homework and sign it. So I raised my hand and said, 'How are you suppose to check it if you don't know how to do it?' And it was stated to me by the principal, 'You ain't got to know how to do it.' I told them, I refuse to sign anything I don't know how to do. I told them, 'You are constantly telling us that we are suppose to be a family -- the teacher, parent and child is suppose to work together. So why should I put my name on something that I don't know what is right or wrong and then I looking like a fool - right. To me that is the way I felt. If I don't know how to do it, I won't sign it because the first thing they will say is this parent don't know how to do this. Don't help the child check over it to see if it is right. Now if you are suppose to help the child, why check over it to see if it is right. They are telling you two things, sign it and make sure it is right. What about parents who didn't finish school.

> Some may have finish the fifth and sixth grade, how do they know what is right or wrong if they never had that in their life, that is making that parent look like a fool. Every answer that child gives is wrong. Right?

Mary feels that it is easy for her to find out from teachers when she doesn't know how to do her children's homework because is there everyday. However, some parents are taking a bum rap because they can't come and find out or they are confused about what is expected of them. Mary things that the amount of homework given is fair. She thinks a good teacher is one who will try and find out as much as she can about a child before making a judgment about a child and his family.

Mary thinks that her children are doing well in school, but if any problem ever arises she will go and see the teacher. She states that no teacher has ever called or visited their home. She is not sure how helpful parent and teacher conferences are because they are held when parents can't come and when they can come the teachers try and talk "over their heads". Mary is active in the P.T.A. and has initiated a number of fund raising drives to raise money for books and supplies.

Mary and Sam believe that parents should do everything they can to help their children in school because you can no longer leave it up to the school to educate the children. Mary believes that parents are going to be more active because school as we know it will not last because of limited funds, teacher strikes, and parents sending their children to private schools. Sam believes in giving the children rewards if they do well in school, an outing, a movie, etc. Mary believes that you should "sock it to them" if they don't bring home good grades. Her punishments range from a whipping to limited or no television at all. Sam says he "screams" a lot but his bark is worse than his bite. Mary feels that the support that is given them at home is enough for them to make good grades and that all they have to do is go to school and eat and sleep.

## TUTORING DURING THE STRIKE: A CASE STUDY

Sam and Mary believe that there are a lot of steps that parents in the community can take to support acquisition of school skill when the school is not functioning or serving the needs of the community. This was evident in the way that Mary organized some families to participate in activities to provide support to the children during the fifty-five day long school strike.

Mary contacted me and discussed the possibilities of my conducting classes on a daily basis in her home for Ann, Sam Jr., and two other families who were good friends of hers. She felt that although parents, including herself, do not have as much "education" as teachers, that by pooling their resources and what "little" knowledge they have they can aid their children.

I agreed to help as much as I could in that it provided me with the opportunity to work and observe the family more closely. In addition, the other families had been part of the previous project and it gave me a chance to reciprocate for the courtesies extended by the families during the other research project.

Mary and the other mothers "dug up" what materials and books they could find to supplement what I brought. Mary and the mothers particpated in the classes so that they could learn with the children and be able to assist them if they had problems. (The fathers of the families were very supportive of the effort but were unable to attend because of work) The parents wanted me to teach Afro history, English, math, and anything that had to do with reading. These were the subjects that they felt that the children needed the most.

On the first day of class I arrived at Mary's home around 9:45 (starting time throughout the strike was between 9:45 - 10:00 and we went until about 12:00). Mary greeted me at the door.

> Mary: Chile, I don't know what we would without you! I can help Junior and put something together for him to do, but I don't know what to do with Ann cause these books I got from the library is too hard for me. (Mary had checked some math and algebra books out of the library for Ann.) She needs to be working on math and English. That school she be going to! That work is so hard! We had been trying to get a hold of you for two weeks. I had told Sheila that I bet you had gone back to North Carolina. (Sheila is one of Mary's friends and one of the families from the other study. Sheila brought her two children to the classes.)

As I entered the room with a box of books that I had borrowed from the reading clinic, Mary instructed me to place them on the table in the dining room. None of the other families had arrived. Ann and Mary's neice were upstairs watching TV and Junior had just come up from the basement. He ran in the dining room and started looking through the books in the box on the table.

> Junior: Mr. M, I bet I can read all of the books in here.

> Mary: Who told you, your "fast" self to go sticking your nose in that box? Git on upstairs and tell Ann and Edna to cut off that TV and git down here.

Junior leaves the room and heads for the stairs. Mary walks to the window and looks out.

> Mary: I bet that Sheila ain't dragged herself out of bed yet. It told her you would be here early and she better get herself and them chaps down here. Wait! Let me give her a call.

While Mary is calling, Junior, Ann and Edna come down the stairs. They greet me and go into the dining room and sit down around the table. Mary yes that there is no answer and that they must be on their way. Mary walks over and sits down at the table and she starts to talk about the strike and how it affects the community.

> Mary: You know they just had a strike not long ago. They just seem to treat our kids any kinda way. If this school was in a white neighborhood, they wouldn't let this strike go on this long. Parents like us don't count. If we don't do something for our kids, they will be left behind. The church is trying to start a program over there but they be so crowded, I decided to see what I could do. So I called Mabel and Sheila and told them I was going to try and get a hold of you and see what we can do. You know these children don't have any business being out of school running the street. I call my mother and told her to send Edna up here so we could help her too. Edna is in the eighth grade and can't barely read. Now you tell me just how could that happen. We just had to start trying to help our own. And them teachers want to complain that we ain't doing nothing at home.

Junior is getting a little restless and wants to know what kind of work I have for him to do. As I started taking out materials the doorbell rang, Mary gets up mumbling "that must be Sheila". As Sheila walks in Mary asks: "Girl, where have you been?" We have better things to do than set around waiting on you all day." Sheila responds, "Girl, Henry wouldn't get up and bring us down here. My pressure been acting up again."

> Mary: You tell Henry he better get up off it and get them children down here when somebody is trying to help them.
>
> Sheila: Girl, you know how Henry is. (Sheila walks back to the living room and places some books on the table that she brought.

> Sheila: Hey, Mr. M, where have you been? You don't love us anymore. I tolk Mary you done gone and shook this town looking for a higher bush and a sweeter berry. How is that son of yours? Why didn't you bring him with you?

The researcher explained that his son was attending an alternative school (the reason that Mary and Sheila were referring to the researcher's long absence was due to the fact that he and his family had been away for three weeks and had had no contact with the families.)

The researcher informs them that it is time to get started in that it is now 10:30.

> Mary: (to Sheila) Have you seen Martha? She was suppose to bring her "bad" children over here. (Everyone laughs.)
>
> Sheila: Girl, no telling where Martha is. (Martha, Sheila, and Mary are good friends and work together at school.)

I took out some material for Sam Jr. to work on and sent him to the living room to work. Ann, Edna and Sheila's son and daughter stayed at the table. Sheila started to go to the living room to sit down.

> Mary: Girl, you better get it back here. This is for you too. (Sheila turns around and starts back.)
>
> Sheila: I don't know how to do any of that stuff.
>
> Mary: Well sit down, you may learn something.

I start by telling them that I will try to come as much as possible to help, but that I might have to cancel out sometime. We spend the next half hour talking about the beginning of history in Africa and early man and a very lively discussion ensues.

> Mary: These children don't know much about how bad Blacks was treated on the ships coming here and how we were and is still treated in this country. That why I made them watch every bit of Roots on television. Ann Ask me 'Momma, is that true, did that really happen?' She didn't believe that it was true.
>
> Sheila: Mr. M, that why we work so hard to raise money to buy those Black history books so our children could know what happen.

(There were several fund raising events spearheaded by Mary and other parent volunteers to purchase 80 copies of an Afro history book for the two six grade classes at school.)

I informed them that we had to halt the discussion and talk about history some more the next if we were going to get math and English completed. Assignments were made in history for the next day and Egnlish assignments were given out.

> Sheila: Mr. M, don't we get a recess period?
>
> Mary: You took your recess period getting over here. (They all laugh.)

I told them that while I checked the work they could have a five minute break. We started back after the break and worked for another thirty minuts. At 12:30 I announced that I had to leave.

> Ann: Mr. M, you better make Momma do her work. She will just fuss with us but I bet you five dollars she won't do it.
>
> Mary: Chile, you better remember who the Momma is in this house. (Everyone laughs while Ann rolls her eyes at her mother.)

I informed them that I expected to have everyone complete the assignments. I told Mary to see if she could contact Martha for the next day's session. Classes were held in the home for the next six weeks. Sheila, Martha, and their families were in regular attendance throughout.

The families were all conscientious about completing the assignments and not goofing off. Mary was especially diligent about completing assignments and was very careful in her writing and in explaining concepts. In spite of this Mary frequently talked about her inability to write and her lack of understanding of what she read.

This mobilization of family resources to support the schooling goals of the children when the school system was down was a theme repeated frequently within the school community. Some of the issues this experience raises for understanding the uses of literacy will be discussed later.

## CRUMSHANK FAMILY

### The Family

Sally - Mother

Sally Crumshank is a very articulate, attractive Black lady in her late twenties. She is divorced and lives along with her son. Sally migrated from Texas to Philadelphia and most of her family remains in Texas. The one exception is a sister (one of four) who lives in Philadelphia. Sally is a supervisor in the Bell Temelphone Company.

Sally has completed high school and four years of college. She states that she had contemplated further study; however, trying to raise Kevin and resolving her marital difficulties left little time or money for school. In her words, she was an achiever when she was in school and because of it is very demanding of her son Teddy. She talks about being the only Black in her class during the integration of school in Texas and the difficulties that she encountered. In her spare time she tutors in a reading and mathematics program for low income kids sponsored by the Telephone Company.

Teddy

Teddy is a very quiet, slender thirteen year old eighth grader. He is an average student and works very hard to keep up. He rarely talks very much at school or home. His mother comments that she can never tell what is on his mind. He loves to play basketball and has a secret ambition to play professionally someday. He watches a variety of television shows and likes Alice, Three's Company, The Jeffersons, and One Day at a Time. He writes down items for shopping, letters to Sally's girlfriend at work and his grandparents and aunts in Texas. He likes to read but has been evaluated as deficient in some of his reading skills (I tutored Teddy twice a week for six weeks during the summer). He loves to read Sports Illustrated, Sporting Reviews, and the sports section in the newspaper. Teddy wants to grow up be a pilot in the air force if he is not successful in becoming a professional basketball player.

Phil and Ora - God parents

Phil and Ora Jones are the God parents of Teddy as well as sister and brother-in-law to Sally. Their importance to the study lies in the fact that they provide a strong support system for Teddy and Sally, but more so for Teddy. Teddy spends all of his time with Phil and Ora during the summer months and when Sally is working. Phil and Ora take Teddy on vacation. They provide transportation to the tutoring session and Ora and Phil keep a daily diary on Teddy's activities over a four week period for the researcher.

Phil and Ora are both nurses and work at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital. Ora works the night shift and Phil works from four until eleven. Ora came to Philadelphia two years before Sally and then invited her to come and live here while she resolved her marital problems.

### The Home

Until recently, Sally and Teddy lived with Phil and Ora. Phil and Ora live on one of the less deteriorated streets in the Shortridge community. There is a block organization where all who live on the street participate in keeping the street clean as well as watching each other's home for burglars or other suspicious activities. Teddy has quite a frew friends who live on this street. As you walk up the steps to the front door of the row house you note a welcome mat at the foot of the door. As you ring the doorbell, you are alerted to the sound of a barking dog. (Phil and Ora own a German Shepherd that is used as a watchdog.) You can hear Phil or Teddy trying to quiet the dog or they will ask that you wait patiently while Prince is taken down to the basement. As you enter through the door, you walk into the living room. The room is carefully decorated with very thick shag carpet on the floor. In a semi-circle is a huge sofa and matching chair with beautiful floral design and covered with plastic to prevent wear. In front of the chair is a fireplace that does not appear to get much use. Over to the right side of the room is a huge mahogany bookcase. On the shelves of the bookcase are volumbes of medical books used by Phila and Ora. There is also a series in hardback of great authors and their works (Mark Twain, Nathanial Hawthorne, Edgar Allen Poe, etc.). There are a large number of volumes by Black authors: Jerome Bennet, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Richard Wright, just to name a few.

Phil is a very avid reader when is not working. Ora states that she reads what is necessary for the job. To the side of the bookcase is a magazine rack that holds copies of Ebony, Jet, Black Enterprise and the Daily News and Tribune newspapers.

Walking through the living room leads into the dining room. There is a large chandelier hanging from the ceiling over the table that seats eight. Teddy does most of his homework in this room. Over in the left corner is a stand which holds a small television set. On a small stand near the door that leads to the kitchen is a telephone and on the wall above it is a bulltein board with pencil and paper attached to it to take messages. On the wall leading from the dining room is a board with Teddy's name on it. It contains a list of dates when exames are scheduled at school for the week. Phil, Ora, and Sally have written "good luck" by each exam and also that a good surprise is in store for him if he passes them.

As you start up the stairs from the living room, you note how the stairs have been utilized for hanging plants. At the top of the stairs are three bedrooms: Sally's, Phil and Ora's and Kevin's.

In Teddy's room is a bed, bureau, desk, closet and a book case. On his desk are the following items: a cup filled with pencils and pens, a lamp, and a book about jokes and riddles titled Where The Sidewalk Ends. On the shelves of his bookcase is a set of childcraft books, a small bible, Sports Illustrated magazines, six books titled: The Underground Railroad, The Parent Trap, Autobiography of Bill Russel, Black Beauty, Crow Boy, and Life and Times of Jackie Robinson.

Teddy's pride and joy is his Atari video game. It was a gift from his mother because he was doing well in school. It is kept on a table by his desk.

## Daily and Weekly Activities

Sally states that she is the first one to get out of bed. After getting ready for work, she fixes Teddy's breakfast and leaves to be at work by 6:30 a.m. After breakfast Teddy will watch the cartoons or Superman before going up the block to catch the bus. Phil usually sees that Teddy doesn't fool around and miss the bus. After Teddy returns home in the afternoon, he is expected to do his homework immediately.

Sally calls home about 3:30 to see if he has started or to remind him not to be any later than 4:00 getting started. She calls even when Phil is home and will get Teddy started on his homework.

Homework in this family is a formal event, done in a business-like manner following a rigid pattern. This may stem from the fact that all in the house appear to be achievers or because of Sally's background in school where expectation were very high.

Following is an observation of one of Teddy's homework sessions. It was raining very hard when I arrived at Phil and Ora's. Phil met me at the door and told me to wait while Teddy put Prince downstairs in the basement (I thought to myself

'You don't have to worry about me waiting outside!')

As I entered, Phil invited me to come in the dining room or take a seat in the living room. I took a seat in the living room so that I could observe Phil interacting with Teddy. He told me to make my self comfortable while he checked on Teddy. As he walked back to the table, he asked Teddy where they were.

> Phil: Are these the same kind of problems you were working on yesterday?
>
> Teddy: They are not the same one but almost.
>
> Phil: Now division is not any harder than your other math. Dividing by three numbers is the same as dividing by one if you understand it.
>
> Teddy: I think I understand it sometime but the teacher goes too fast.
>
> Phil: You should raise your hand and ask questions when you don't understand. Mrs. P. says that you don't ask any questions, and she assume that you know it until you fail the test.

Teddy didn't respond to the last comment. Phil starts to demonstrate how to work one of the problems and goes through it step by step.

> Phil: Do you see how that is done?
>
> Teddy: I think so.
>
> Phil: See if you can work these.

Phil leaves the dining room and returns to the living room where I am setting.

> Phil: He has a trouble with math and I try to help as much as possible. He is kind of slow to catch on but if he understand it he can move on it.

Phil and Ora have no children of their own and bestow much attention on Teddy. Phil always appears to respond to him in a fatherly way.

Teddy makes a movement to indicate that he is finished working the problems. Phil gets up and goes back to the table and comments "Let's see what we have here."

> Phil: You look like you have these right. Did you understand how to do them?

> Terry: I think so.
>
> Phil: Work the rest of that page so that they will be finished when your mother gets home.

Teddy continues to work until he finishes his math. After his math is finished, he stops and fixes himself a sandwich. Phil cuts the televsion on to catch the evening news. Ora comes downstairs having gotten up from her nap to prepare supper and get ready for work.

She walks in the dining room and asks Teddy how the work is coming along and did he find something to made a sandwich out of. Sally arrives about 5:45. She greets everyone and goes upstairs to change clothes. When she comes back down, she goes immediately to check Teddy's homework. They talk about what went on in school and what she did on her job. Phil and Ora seem to avoid talking to Teddy or Sally while they talk about the day's activities. Phil gets ready to leave for work after saying that he will pick up a sandwich at work. Ora goes back upstairs and Sally asks Teddy to read a passage to her from his history book. This ritual is carried out everynight. Sally comments on his reading:

> He could read better but I am not stressing the point as much because he didn't like to read at all. He is at the point where I use to try to force him to read and make him read till he'd cry and then he would read and wouldn't understand. So now he's reading, and I am not pressuring him to read. He goes to the library and gets the books that he wants to read. I tell him, you go in there and pick out what you want. He picked out Elvis Presley. He liked him, and I didn't care as long as he wants, he reading, I don't care what he reads.

After Teddy finishes reading Sally informs me that they were getting ready to go to Bible Study - that this was a new addition to their weekly schedule. I told them I understood and left.

On subsequent visits homework was in the process of being completed or was completed and Teddy would be watching televsion. He is only allowed to watch two programs before he retires for the night. During spring time he is allowed to go outside and play with his friends for a while. He is not allowed to entertain or play much with his friends during the week. Teddy's chores are to take out the garbage, feed Prince, and run errands to the store. On the weekend his activities consist of sleeping late on Saturday morning. After a late breakfast he goes to the wrestling matches with Phil. If he doesn't go to church, he will usually write his grandparents.

Teddy and his mother do many things together. They have traveled to the Bahamas and many states. Sally belongs to a Mother's Club that plans trips to amusement parks and other places of interest. They play scrabble and work out the puzzle in the TV section of the newspaper. They also collect coupons and trade those off that they don't use. Sally states that they save on the average of ten dollars a week on their grocery bill. It is Teddy's job to go through the newspaper and magazines to collect the coupons.

When it comes to television watching, their taste runs pretty much the same. The watch the same programs together and then discuss them. I watched Jesus of Nazareth with them just before the holiday. According to Sally it came on at the right time because the night before they had attended a Bible study session that dealt with the subject and Sally had just given Teddy a bible story book that he was reading. As we watched the story unfold, Sally would point out parts of the story that had been discussed the night before. Sally talked about other programs that they had watched such as Holocaust, Roots, and Shogun.

Teddy is allowed to go and visit with Sally's many girlfriends on the weekend. They all claim him as their "suitor".

## Beliefs about Raising Children

Sally believes that the parents play a great role in the education of their children at home and that if the parents know that the child is slow, they can enforce the kid and can start teaching before he gets to school. She likes Shortridge and feels that it is doing a good job. She feels that communication between home and the school leaves something to be desired. Teachers have never called her at home or made contact with her. She feels that a good teacher is one who can motivate and stimulate the children to learn without yelling and screaming at them. Sally feels that parents have a hard time making their feelings known about what they expect from the teachers because there are few times to get together with the exception of the "mock" school days where parents are allowed to come to the school and play the role of their children. She thinks some teachers try very hard to teach but that others are there just for the paycheck. When teachers lived in the neighborhood, visited the church, and were involved in communicty affairs, schools and families had much stronger ties.

## Some Emerging Themes

### Support System

The support system that has been developed around Teddy cannot help but create a positive feeling about himself. His mother and God parents go to great lengths to price whatever support is needed at school or at home. If Sally is not available Phil and Ora are there. Sally or Ora will go to the school whenver a conference is needed. His extended family involves him in all kinds of activities which aid his growth and aim to make him feel important.

### Reading

There is much reading material in Teddy's home. Reading is done to gain information as well as for enjoyment. Teddy reads basically to gain information and to complete assignments. Sally reads mystery and horror stories for enjoyment in addition to her reading for work and to gain information. In Ora's case, reading is important in her attempt to stay abreast with information for better job performance. Phil reads for pleasure and to gain information. From all indications, reading in this home is seen as a very important event to serve many purposes, help with homework, job performance, gain information, and for enjoyment.

Seeing how hard Sally pushes to have the researcher tutor Teddy in the basic skills substantiates this view on the importance of ready. Teddy also felt this importance. He missed only one tutoring session out of the six weeks I worked with him and that was when the family went on a trip to Virginia.

### Television

Television has only limited use in this family. It is a medium used for enjoyment and to gain infromation through news programs. Sally, Phil, and Ora make it clear that they prefer that Teddy read with limited television watching. As opposed to some homes, the television was rarely on when I visited the Crumshank home.

The programs that were watched wre discussed for value rather than for sheer enjoyment. For instance, it was suggested that Teddy watch Wild Kingdom . Sally had ordered cards with different animals on them so that he could recognize them while he watched the programs.

### Writing

Writing for the adults, centers around job related activities with little done beyond. Sally states, "After writing all day on the job, the only thing I do is play these games, Seek and Find, occasionally I will write a letter, but I don't do it all the time." Writing is also pretty much restricted to demands for Phil and Ora.

Teddy writes out a grocery list everytime he is sent to the store on his own. When he goes away, he writes his mother letters and he appears to enjoy writing imaginary stories during the tutoring session. Homework is another time for writing. Teddy indicated his enthusiasm for writing by using a legal pad for keeping his weekly journal for me. The journal pages were very detailed and much time was spent writing them. As mentioned, Teddy is very introverted which may be related to his penchant for writing things down.

## SUMMARY

### Literacy Use

Literacy use is woven throughout the daily lives in both homes. There are some important differences depdning on the way the families are organized. In the Johnson family little writing is done by the adults and more by the children. Games are chosen for their value in aiding the children in school. There appears to be a greater use of television as an adjunt to reading in the Johnson family than in the Crumshank family. In essence there is a more informal atmosphere in the Johnson home. The Crumshank family is carefully organized with both acquisition and its use taken very seriously.

Parents in both families are careful to provide support for their children's development. This contrasts sharply with the school's perception reported in the earlier literacy report (Hymes, 1981). As a result there is little real meshing of the school and home support systems.

Although most of the participants in the study claimed that they did not like to read, I was struck by the information that was brought out during conversation that had been gleaned from reading. For example, Ann, who consistently stated her dislike for reading, was usually reading a magazine when the researcher arrived. She also read a student bible which enabled her to win money in a contest at bible school naming characters in the old and new testaments. When told by the researcher that she spent a lot of time reading for someone who didn't like to read, she stated that she meant school books and long books.

Sam who stated that he read very little would engage me in conversation about news stories that he had read or about old magazines and comic books in the basement. Sam Jr. was the only one who admitted that he liked to read.

The games, even though played for fun, appeared to be carefully selected to help develop certain skills in math and reading.

## The Extended Family Support

Mary sees one of her primary roles to be the responsibility for literacy development in the home. However, she is aware that Sam is the back up system. For example, when Sam arrives home from work he started out by asking is homework completed to both children. "What did you do today?" he will ask. He will inquire of Mary as to whether or not there were problems with the children. "Do they have all the supplies that they need" and "Who needs punishing?" He called every day during the class sessions that were conducted by the researcher during the strike. Sam and Mary act as monitors, watching and checking to make sure that the children's homework is done and they try to explain things that the children don't know about. They also explicitly use homework to gain as much knowledge as they can for themselves. Even when Ann and Sam Jr. pretend to be "mad" with Sam and Mary, they seek them out for answers to most of their questions. Even though Ann knows that Mary may not know how to work certain math problems, she seeks her help before she calls a friend on the phone for hlep. She does the same with Sam, constantly articulating the support relationship within the family.

According to Ann, Junior is her "worst enemy"; however, she finds time to assist him with his homework and to play numerous games with him. The support system extends to other members of the family. This is evident by many concerns for Edna, and the way Mary and her sister keep the children involved in literacy events such as bible school and getting together for other religious events.

Use of writing in the home by the children is limited to school work, stories that Junior writes, and Ann's diary. Sam's job requires writing but he does very little beyond fill out his income tax. He says that his main reason for writing would be classified as work related as when he is doing carpentry work. The family doesn't make out grocery lists nor do they use a checking account. Mary states that she used to write letters but never mailed them just to get Junior interested in writing.

# OBSERVATIONS ON THE ENVIRONMENT AND LIFESTYLES OF A DECLARED NON-READER AND TWO DECLARED READERS

Andrea Robinson

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# OBSERVATIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE LIFESTYLES OF A DECLARED NON-READER AND DECLARED READERS

## OVERVIEW

This study shows through interview and observation that a child who says that he does not read, did in fact read considerably during the course of his daily routine. To gain a picture of the lifestyle and environment surrounding the declared reader and the declared non-reader, three boys, one 13 year old and two 12 year olds, were observed. Matt and Jon Drake were brothers raised in the same literacy supported environment. Unlike his brother, Matt did not like to read. Matt had the same temperment and lifestyle as Thom Andrews, the third child in the study. Both boys were active, avid sports fans, who liked being with people.

## THE ANDREWS' BOYS

The Andrews are a low-middle income, Black family. Both Mr. and Mrs. Andrews work. Mrs. Andrews has a secretarial position, and does typing for her church and her friends. Mr. Andrews is a committeeman, a community activist, a deacon in his church and the union president on his job. Both parents have high school diplomas and both have recently decided to attend college at some future time.

The Andrews have two sons. Fred, the youngest boy, is currently in the third grade at Shortridge Elementary School. He is in the top academic tract and brings home all A's and B's on his report card. Prior to entering public school, he attended a private pre-school program. He learned phonetic reading skills, writing and mathematics (addition, subtraction, and multiplication). At his mother's request, Fred was tested and granted early admittance to the first grade.

Fred's older brother, Thom, also entered school with reading and math skills. He had attended a different pre-school program and entered the first grade at six years of age. Thom's first grade teacher provided special reading lessons for him in class and encouraged his mother to continue to work with him at home. Thom says that he likes to read. He is now 12 years old and in the seventh grade at Penniman Demonstration School. His report card and California Achievement Scores (94th percentile) indicate that he is a good student. Thom is reserved and well-mannered in public, but lively and playful among his friends. His is an avid sports fan, actively participating in organized track and basketball.

This is a very busy household. Thom's sports teams compete in cities up and down the east coast. His father, and sometimes the entire family, accompany him on these trips. Mr. Andrews attends numerous meetings and events associated with his community, political and union activities. In addition, the family is very active in their church. To manage all of this, the family has become highly organized. Over the weekend, Mrs. Andrews prepares most of the meals for the week. Shopping is sone by the whole family early on Saturday mornings or on holidays. Most of the housework is done by Mrs. Andrews at night while the rest of the family is sleeping. The family rises very early (5:00 a.m.) and goes to bed early (before 10:00 p.m.).

## THE HOME AS LITERACY ENVIRONMENT

Reading materials for the boys (books and magazines) are kept on shelves in each of the boys' rooms. A set of encyclopedias are in a bookcase in the living-room. Both boys like to do their homework and study lying on the living-room floor. Non-school related reading is usually done in the bedrooms. The availability of reading material and their placement in the house, in this instance, appears to influence the frequency of their use. Thom uses his encyclopedias extensively for homework assignments, but makes less use of them for non-school related reading. However, Thom says that he enjoys reading, and he reads the books, comics, magazines and sports cards kept in his room.

### Homework

Mrs. Andrews closely supervises the homework of both boys. When dinner is finished, she sits with them, gives them quizzes, organizes and directs their written work, tutors them in needed areas and actively helps them on some occasions. In one instance, Thom had a science project due and a major test in history on the same day. Mrs. Andrews worked on his project while Thom studied for the test.

During the summer and when the children miss school because of illness, Mrs. Andrews has the children use workbooks and the Cycloteacher (a programmed learning tool) to strengthen their math and English skills.

### Source of Reading Materials

The public library is the major source for books. Magazines and animal cards were ordered through the mail. Thom purchases books at sales in school and collects sports cards from bubble gum wrappers.

## Importance of Interests

With the exception of comic books, most of the other reading materials in the Andrews' household appear to be read to acquire knowledge in special interest areas: Mr. Andrews reads religious material; Mrs. Andrews searches magazines for recipes, coupons and contests; the youngest boy reads comics, animal cards and sports cards; and Thom reads sports stories, sports biographies, sports magazines, sports cards and animal cards, comics, science fiction and love stories. The science fiction and comics are read because they are enjoyed. However, the love stories fit into the search-for-knowledge pattern. Mrs. Andrews says, "He's (Thom) been reading a lot of love books too, recently. I guess he's trying to learn about the birds and the bees."

## The Newspaper

The newspaper serves as a source of daily reading for the parents. They buy one of the city's major papers each day. In addition, they receive a community based paper weekly and buy a copy of a second major paper on Saturdays. Both parents read the news, especially political news. Mrs. Andrews clips recipes, coupons and restaurant specials. Mr. Andrews reads the sports and the children read the movie listings and comic pages.

## Classroom Observations

Thom was observed in a math class at school. He was a quiet, intent student, paying close attention to the teacher's lecture. Although other students in the class were easily distracted, he did not appear to notice when two visitors stopped to look in on his class. The teacher asked questions periodically during his lecture. Thom did not raise his hand to volunteer an answer; however, he knew the correct answer when called upon.

## Parental Support

Thom's parents are deeply concerned that both their sons receive a good education. When they were young, neither parent had considered college as one of their options. They now see college as a means to personal and economic growth. Much of their time and energy is spent preparing their children so that they can go to college and beyond. Mrs. Andrews takes time off from work to visit her sons' schools; she establishes and maintains contact with their teachers, and she closely supervises the boys' school work. During the summer, she provides regular practice in English and math skills.

Both parents also maintain a close supportive relationship with their children in other areas. All contests, plays and programs the children participate in are attended by the entire family. Mr. Andrews goes to Thom's basketball games and track meets, in and out-of-town. When Mr. Andrews is unavailable, Mrs. Andrews accompanies Thom to track practice. They feel it is important for him to have someone to cheer him on. Special accomplishments in school, sports, etc. are rewarded with clothing articles, new sports equipment or dinner out. Mr. Andrews takes the boys to sporting events; and the family eats out frequently, shops together, attends movies, and vacations away each year.

### Thom's Activities

As mentioned before, Thom likes sports. He plays intramural basketball in school and belongs to a junior league basketball team that competes in various cities along the east coast. When the neighborhood recreation center is open, he plays basketball with the high school boys in the community. Winter months, he plays football in the street. During the spring, summer and fall, he runs with a track team. Although he is small in stature, he is a skilled athlete and has won trophies and medals in both basketball and track.

Thom has many friends his own age, and he gets along well with the teenagers in the neighborhood. His father is active in keeping peaceful relations among gang members in the community. This gives Thom a lot of opportunity to participate in activities (dances, fairs and sports) designed for the older boys.

The Andrews encourage their sons' participation in the family church. Thom attends Sunday School, the meetings of several young peoples' organizations (BTU, Youth Church, etc.) and special religious sessions. He is on the choir and the usher board and participates in church plays, spelling bees and speech contests. He has won the local speech contest twice and has finished either first or second in the spelling bee. Prizes in these contests consist of plaques and religious books for all participants. Thom has read many of these books without any urging from his parents.

With all of his activities, Thom has little time for just reading that is not school related. He makes time by reading on the trolley on the way to school each morning and while he is waiting for his mother to leave work in the evening.

## THE DRAKE BOYS

The Drakes have four children, three boys and one girl. They are a low income, Black family living in the same community as the Andrews family. Both parents recently earned college degrees.

in evening school and are now working on their Masters degrees. Mr. and Mrs. Drake have worked at various jobs through the years and have operated two businesses, a photography studio and a bicycle repair shop. They are currently state welfare recipients.

Mr. Drake is a committeeman, community activist and coach of two track teams, his own team and a church team. He has served on the board of two community organizations, taught in an alternative school during the recent school strike, counseled youths and adults on college programs and tutored his classmates. As a volunteer, he teaches Black history to former gang members at the House of Umoja.

Mrs. Drake also volunteers in community organizations and at the Longstreth School. She has tutored neighborhood children in reading and math, taught at the alternative school and serves as Judge of Elections.

Both parents worked with their children before they entered school. Reading and quantity concepts were taught by utilizing household items and playing games while traveling in the car. With the exception of the youngest child, all of the children entered first grade with reading and math skills. Mrs. Drake explained that the youngest child received less preparation partly because she and her husband had less time to spend teaching him and because he matured later than the rest of the children. She believes that a child has to show a willingness to learn. The youngest child resisted her attempts to teach him, preferring to play instead.

Jon, the oldest son, entered first grade reading on the Lippincott fourth grade level. Special arrangements were made for him to take reading with a grourth grade class and later, he received enrichment in a reading skills center. He is now 13 years old, in the eighth grade at Penniman School and doing well (91st percentile on the CAT).

The Drakes' second oldest son, Matt, went to kindergarten for half a year, and then at his parents' request was transferred to first grade. At the time, Mrs. Drake was volunteering in Jon's first grade class. Since kindergarten was a half-day program, Matt had been spending the afternoons in Jon's first grade class. Matt could read at the second grade level when he started kindergarten and his parents felt he could handle first grade. At first all went well, Matt was successful in first and second grade. By third grade, his marks began to decline. He made no progress in the fourth grade. Mrs. Drake partly blames his teacher for this. She cites complaints by other parents that their children also did not progress. Although he received no grade lower than a C on his report card, the Drakes requested that Matt be allowed to remain in the fourth grade. His second time in the fourth grade, Matt advanced three levels in math and four levels in reading. Matt is now a 12 year old, seventh grade student at Penniman School who says that he does not like to read.

## The Drake Household

The Drakes run an informal household. The telephone is in constant use, and there is a steady stream of visitors (children and adults). The Drake children have been taught to be independent at an early age. Both parents attend evening college, so several nighta a week the children manage alone. They feed themselves, do their homework, clean-up and go to bed unsupervised. Although Mrs. Drake prepares most of the meals, the three older children can prepare meals when necessary. The two oldest boys travel throughout the south, west and center city using public transportation. They visit relatives and handle business (at banks, utility companies and at city hall) for their parents.

Literacy activities are abundant in the Drake house. Both parents read and write a great deal for their college courses. The children write notes informing on each other's behavior. Messages are left at night for the parents telling them of telephone calls or reminding them of forms to sign and important activities at school. Sometimes one of the children will leave a note expressing love.

The Drake parents constantly stress the importance of the written word. Mr. Drake often has the children read papers he has written for school. One one occasion, the parents had a bad experience on a bus excursion. Mr. Drake wrote a letter to the bus company to complain. The incident had involved loud, abusive language on the part of the driver and Mr. Drake. The letter made use of formal English and higher level vocabulary. Mr. Drake had the children read the letter, and explained to them that the letter was written in its 'educated' form to add force to the complaint.

Mr. Drake considers himself a non-reader. He frequently remarks in front of the children that Mrs. Drake reads more than normal, and that he wishes he could read as much as she does. However, observation revealed that he actually reads a great deal in conjunction with his daily activities. During meals, he reads the sports sections of the newspaper and selected news stories. He collects and reads Bulletin Almanacs. He ahs all but two of the Almanacs dating from 1924 to 1976. He has college catalogues from across the country that he studies to plan his own career and to counsel others. During thetrack season, he reads track journals, track stats and literature sent by other track clubs and associations.

Mrs. Drake reads for extended periods of time, sometimes through the night. She says that mystery books help her to relax between work or study sessions.

## The Home as a Literacy Environment

The Drake house is filled with reading materials. Newspapers can be seen on the couch, tables and chairs. There is a floor to ceiling bookcase on the enclosed porch. Other book shelves are in the second floor hall and two of the bedrooms. On various occasions, books were seen on the bathtub edge, radiators and the bathroom floor. Book types include: early years books (Dr. Seuss, Bernstein books, Disney collections, etc.); young people books (mysteries, sport biographies, adventure stories, etc. - many bought by the children themselves); reading texts (workbooks and texts given to Mrs. Drake when she was a classroom volunteer); science, history, math and English texts collected from the parents' school days; poetry, drama and short story anthrlogies found in thrift shops; language books (Latin, German, Spanish); Black history and Black authored literature; and assorted texts on track techniques and track personalities.

## Source of Books

When the children were younger, Mrs. Drake subscribed to book clubs and magazines such as Ranger Rick and National Geographic, Jr. She also regularly attended Books for Tots (a government sponsored program designed to bring books into low income homes). Other reading materials were bought at thrift shops or school book sales. The three older children purchase many of their own books. Even Matt, who says he does not like to read, has bought more than twenty books with his own money. He says, "...I like collecting books. I don't read it that much, but I like collecting them... So if I would do (sic) want to read them, I could read them and plus I just have to have them."

Another source of reading material, usually associated with school, is the encyclopedia. The Drake children use their set frequently to pursue an interest, to check something they saw on television, or to settle an argument. These uses are in addition to the general use by students and teachers to look up specific topics for specific items of information in school.

## Homework

Except for the youngest child, homework is an independent project. All of the children do their homework together around the dining room table. If help is needed, parents usually refer the children to dictionaries and resource books instead of giving direct answers. If their is a problem with math, Mrs. Drake uses similar examples to show the child how to solve the problem on his own. Only written papers are directly edited by the parents. Otherwise parental involvement in homework consists of the questions: "Is your homework done?" and "Is there anything else you can study?"

## Television

Time spent watching television not only reduces available reading time in the Drake house, it also lessens family interaction. The Drakes have two television sets. For a period of about two months both televisions were kept in the parents' bedroom. Mr. Drake felt that the children were watching too much. Without the TV, the children talked to each other and to their parents more, relating stories they had seen on TV or at the movies. They played cards together (pinochle, gin, 500 rummy, solitaire) often with either or both parents and taught their 7 year old brother to play solitaire.

## The Newspaper

Everyone in the family makes use of the newspaper: parents read the news items and sports pages and do the crossword puzzles or word games; daughter uses the front page articles and editorials for school; youngest son looks at the comics and does the mazes and the Missing Pieces puzzle; older boys read movie and TV listings and the comics.

## Classroom Observations

Matt enjoys getting good grades. He is attentive and responsive in the classroom. A math class was observed in which the teacher spent most of the class period going over problems that had been assigned for homework. Matt raised his hand for every question. Other children in the classroom were talking and writing in their notebooks, but Matt's attention remained directed at the teacher. He was called upon several times to give an answer. He was correct each time.

Jon was observed in a Spanish class. He sat at a lunchroom-like table that made it necessary for him to turn away from the table to see the tacher. Jon seldom did this. He sat through most of the class with his eyes on his notebook. The teacher's approach involved a lot of interaction between students and teacher. While the class was reviewing the homework, Jon occasionally raised his hand to answer questions. When he had given his answer, he returned to studying his notebook. Sometimes he continued to look at his book even when his hand was up in the air.

The second part of the lesson consisted of Spanish conversation. This produced a lot of laughter as the students tried to conduct a conversation with the teacher solely in Spanish. Jon did not participate in this part. He kept his back to the teacher, looking at his notebook. He did not join in any of the laughter.

At the end of class, the teacher returned quiz papers from a previous class. Jon had an A-.

Parental Support Activities

The Drakes recognize their children's abilities and consciously seek ways to encourage their development. The following are examples of their efforts:

All of the children were told to sit and watch a television movie, "Master Killer". The movie detailed the early life of a Kung Fu master, the rigorous physical and mental training he had to undergo, and the fantastic feats he was capable of performing as a result of his training. (The parents wanted the children to see what a man is capable of is he has discipline and training.)

Jon wanted to play outside, but Mr. Drake insisted that he remain and watch the entire program. Jon returned to his seat showing displeasure. There was an unhappy expression on his face, his eyes were directed at the floor during most of the movie. He showed no sign of laughter during the funny scenes and made no contributions to the talk about the film. Matt and the other children discussed the film, laughed and otherwise seemed to enjoy the movie.

In another instance, Mr. Drake began teaching the family Spanish. Both parents had discussed their desire for their children to be bilingual. Mr. Drake had studied Spanish and is a proficient speaker of the language. During the school strike, he began teaching the family (and outside children who attended tutoring lessons in the Drake home) Spanish vocabulary and usage. These lessons ceased when the school reopened.

One night Mr. Drake began the lessons again for the family only. He taught the words for vegetables, meats, etc., words that would normally be used during dinner. Everyone, including the mother participated.

These lessons lasted for only two nights. However, the Drakes still speak of the children learning Spanish before they reach high school.

Another type of support is provided by the many family discussions that revolve around literacy related issues. The following typical dinner table conversation is illustrative.

| | |
|---|---|
| Matt | Should Wrigley's Spearmint Gum have all capital first letters? My teacher says no. |
| Mrs. Drake | Your teacher says no because she assumes the gum's name is Wrigley's and the kind of gum is spearmint. I think the whole thing is the name so it should all be capitals. |
| Mr. Drake | I agree with your mother. |
| Mrs. Drake | You all need to learn that teachers are not always right, just as all books are not always right. |

For a while, Matt and his sister tell the family jokes that they have learned in school. Then:

| | |
|---|---|
| Jon | Today, my teacher said, "Woe is I". Is that right? |
| Mr. Drake | That's right grammatically, but the expression is "Woe is me". |

## Matt and Jon's Activities

Careful observations were made of the two brothers' activities to see if what they did could explain why one brother said he liked to read and the other brother said he did not.

Matt is very active: he has a paper route, he takes his younger brother to the movies at least twice a month, he spends a lot of time watching television, he plays football and baseball in the street, he spends his own money to go to Phillies games, he played Little League baseball until his team disbanded, he plays intramural basketball in school and runs track and cross country for his father's team. In addition, he sings on the school choir and participates in church spelling bees, speech contests and plays. Matt says that the reason he doesn't like to read is that it takes too much time.

Jon differs from his brother and Thom Andrews. Physically, he is a year older and stocky. He likes sports, but he is not as active as the other boys. He joined the intramural volleyball team in school this year and does well in it. This is the first organized sport he has volunteered to take part in since he became stocky. When he was younger and smaller, he ran on his father's track team. As he gained weight, he became unhappy with track and refused to participate in any sport activity he did not organize himself.

Football is his favorite sport, but the part he enjoys best is organizing and directing the play of others. He seldom watches a complete game on television; yet, after school, on weekends, in a drizzle, he is in the park or on the street playing ball. He says, "I am basically the captain and trainer of the team".

Jon has many varied interests and literacy activities can be identified in most of them. He is a loyal Star Trek fan. He watches all the Star Trek reruns, owns several Star Trek records, is writing a science fiction book based on the Star Trek idea. He had been writing this book for more than a year in long hand. Then he started typing his handwritten notes. He says that he enjoys editing his typed papers. More recently, he said that he was composing while he typed. He says that he has had no spelling errors, only errors of omission and punctuation.

This interest in Star Trek has led Jon to seek out and read material on astronomy, space colonization and exploration, and astronaut training. His major source for this information is the public library and the encyclopedia. Other areas Jon researches include: ships and weapons, military uniforms and training, refrigeration, animals and mythology.

Music is also one of Jon's favorite pastimes. He has had piano and clarinet lessons for a short peiod of time. The piano lessons ceased when he lost access to a borrowed piano, and the clarinet was returned to school when his parents had to urge him too much to practice. Recently, he wanted to learn to play the bass guitar. Lessons weren't available in school and his parents couldn't afford private lessons. Jon saved money to restring an old electric guitar and used practice books to learn to play at home. However, he does not practice consistently. Jon is a member of the school choir and the school Barbershop Quartet. Both boys can read music, though neither parent has a background in music.

Most of Jon's time is spent listening to music. He likes classical music as well as raps. He has composed some of his own raps. These are taped rather than written on paper. Taping takes less time and allows him to hear what he has composed.

Jon reads more than the other boys. When he is not seeking information, he reads mystery stories, comics, and science fiction. There is also a lot of reading connected with the games he likes to play, football and Dungeons and Dragons. In talking about how he prepares himself to act as manager and trainer for his football team, he said:

> I've read the football article in the encyclopedia a couple of times, and I have a game called NFL Football Strategy. It's a game, all right, but it also has football plays, tendencies and strategies of football teams and lapses of football teams - what they don't seem to do in emergencies.

The other game, Dungeons and Dragons, implements a number of literacy skills: reading and comprehension - the game's directions are lengthy and intricate. Numerous handbooks and guides are solt to supplement the basic game kit: vocabulary - characters and their abilities have to be clearly defined for the participants to play the game properly; writing - descriptions of dungeons and characters must be written out in detail for future reference. The following is Jon's description of what he has to do as a Dungeon Master:

> I have to lead them (the players) through the dungeon and every evil character they meet, I'm the evil character. I'm the mind of the character.
>
> It (the game) involves dice, little books and dungeons. Dungeons is where they try to find gold. The dice determines the moves, the hits and the strikes. I read the books to reference evil characters and what is in the room itself.
>
> For the characters there's certain characteristics they need to have. OK, I take three six-sided dice. The highest they can score is an eighteen, and the higher the better. And there's six or seven characteristics they need to have. OK, on the side of a loose leaf paper they have these initials: D - dexterity. That shows the speed and agility of the person. Uhn, C - for constitution. That's their strength and endurance. S - for strength, W - for wisdom and Ch - for charisma, that's how good they are/do their courage.

When asked why he needs the book and paper, he said:

> That (the book) describes the character. Well these, what I've just explained, go on separate pieces of paper, the characters names and their hit points and armor class. Now hit points is (sic) when that particular person has been hit, OK, by a sword or anything. You take away so many hit points to show their damage or wounds and the lowest hit points you can get is negative ten on the integer scale and that shows the person is dead.
>
> I write who the character is, what his ability is, how much money, and what his weapons. But whoever I give that piece of paper to, the person, they give their chracter their name, OK, and they control the character's action. Also they get to choose from different characters: a cleric - that's a priest who's involved in, let's say witch/sorcery, a thief who's good at stealing, OK, an assassin is a very good marksman, a halfling - that's a cross between a dwarf and a human - grows about to a maximum height of five feet...

Creativity, mathematics, organization, planning, reading and writing are all in a game Jon and his classmates go to school early to play before class begins.

## SUMMARY

All three of the boys observed in this study demonstrate that literacy plays an important role in their lives, despite the fact that one of them did not like to read and viewed himself as a non-reader. Furthermore much of this literacy activity was in no way related to regular school work. Reading and writing simply occur in the pursuit of sports, in the process of playing a game, or in the course of a dinner conversation.

Moreover, environment and lifestyle do not appear to be determining factors in whether a child will like or dislike reading. Interviews with the boys in the study, however, suggest that the perception of reading as work produces a negative effect. Matt viewed reading as "when a person gets something with writing on it and studies it and tries to figure out what it means". In contrast his brother Jon, who likes to read, says, "Reading is taking in knowledge to have a greater vocabulary and to heighten your skill of comprehending."

One implication appears obvious. If reading could be projected as a means to acquire knowledge in areas of interest, and if high interest activities such as football and Dungeons and Dragons could be incorporated into reading programs, many non-readers should come to realize that they like to read.

# SOME SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF LITERACY FOR SOUTHEAST ASIANS IN WEST PHILADELPHIA

Gail Weinstein

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# SOME SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF LITERACY

## Reflections of a Backyard Ethnographer

## BACKGROUND

Vue Yang*, a young man of 25, sat patiently beside the pastor until it was time to give a bible reading in Hmong. During his two-minute reading, the Hmong in the congregation looked up to listen, and the Americans seemed to relax and let the music of the language was over them. After the service, I was introduced to Vue as an English teacher who was interested in the refugees in the neighborhood. He invited me to visit at his home.

I took up the invitation despite a cold and a sore throat. Finding their row house, the only one intact in a row of gutted and abandoned structures, I rang the bell and waited. I was welcomed into a second floor apartment. Two old beds were pushed together against one wall, where two babies were sleeping in heaps of blankets. Plants crowded a table next to a TV against the other wall. On the bathroom door, there was a magazine picture of a very muscular wrestler gritting his teeth. As soon as my cold became apparent, Vue's wife, Lee, cut some giner root and rubbed it on my neck and arms. This was the beginning of a friendship that is still in process.

Vue and Lee are among more than 150 families who have come from the hilltops of Laos, via abysmal camps in Thailand, and have somehow ended up scattered in West Philadelphia rowhouses and apartments. In a subsistance farming society, where rice provided the staple, and opium a source of cash, there was little need for reading and writing. Most Hmong did not learn how. The few who did learned in Laotian schools, using the Lao language. The setting has changed from warm rice and opium fields to a snowy urban maze of institutions, English speakers, and print.

What kinds of problems have to be solved by these refugees that involve literacy? How are they solved? After teaching preliterate refugee women in the local library basement and their husbands at the Community College downtown, I became convinced that language and literacy programs could become more effective and useful only to the extent that they consider what literacy means to their participants. What does school mean to them? What does literacy mean? What is read and written by whom?

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*All names have been changed

To begin to look at these questions, I arranged to spend four weeks with Vue and Lee and their two children. Weekday evenings were characterized by meals together after our respective days of studying, childcare, and teaching. Weekends afforded more time for visiting, sewing, and excursions (i.e. to Reading to visit a sick brother, or to the Spectrum for an evening of wrestling).

My first discovery was that four weeks was time enough for little more than laying the foundations of a friendship - where friendship grows from sharing not only great adventures, but also daily routines. Also, as I looked on while Vue and Lee navigated their way through welfare and educational bureaucracies, community activities, and a variety of interactions with both Americans and Hmong, I made many discoveries.

I will suggest in these pages that literacy, as one among many language skills, can be viewed as:

1) a tool used for negotiating with new institutions,
2) a tool possessed by those who mediate between culture groups, and
3) a tool associated with articulating new social status in a changing social order.

By describing some glimpses I have caught through my keyhole, I hope to create a framework in which literacy can be examined as an addition as well as a change agent in a whole communicative economy with profound effects on the relationships of the participants.

## LITERACY AS A TOOL FOR NEGOTIATING WITH NEW INSTITUTIONS

One Tuesday afternoon, Vue received a letter from his caseworker saying that he had to show up at her office Friday morning, or his "case" would be "closed". The letter instructed him to bring four documents with him, including one which had to be stamped by an agency several miles away, (and not easily accessible by public transportation), and others which required picking up various forms with signatures from several other places.

Vue had already planned to take off from school on Thursday afternoon to pay phone and electric bills. He says he has to pay them in cash, because if he puts more than a very small amount of money in a checking account, his benefits will be cut. This left only Thursday morning, since he had a test in school on Wednesday that he felt he could not miss.

That evening, Vue spent time usually used for homework to fix his bicycle. He knew that he could not cover all necessary bases on foot in one day. He called his English teacher to tell her he would be absent on Thursday and Friday.

On Friday, Vue reported to his caseworker with all of the forms. His signature was required, as was Lee's. Vue got home by midday, when he took over watching the children. Lee and I repeated the journey on the Broad Street subway to give the second signature. I showed her how to distinguish North-bound from South-bound, and how to find the right stop to get off for future reference.

At the welfare office, we waited in bolted-down wooden seats for Lee's name to be called. On the wall across from where we were sitting were two written signs: "EFFECTIVE 11-8-81 Foodstamps will be given out only between 2:30 - 3:30 pm" and "PLEASE NOTE: Any foodstamps not picked up within five days will be returned to Harrisburg". Lee's name was called. She signed the form and we left.

Vue is among the better-educated Hmong who fled from Laos. The son of a town merchant, he was able to attend school for four years before becoming a soldier. He guesses, with no aid from birth documents, that he was about twelve or thirteen when he left school to become a soldier. By then he had already acquired what would be some precious coding and decoding skills with print.

Vue comments that he likes his present caseworker because "she help us everything". Just lucky, he reflects. In his other house in a different neighborhood, the old caseworker "...window broken, he don't care. No heat, he don't do anything. New baby born, he don't help extra money." Some neighbors have difficulty even with the "good" caseworker. Xi, an older woman living one floor below, does not know how to decipher forms, letters or bills. Preparing the required documents is an insurmountable task for her. One evening Vue disappeared with a pan full of meat. Returning to the apartment, he explained that he had intervened with the caseworker on Xi's behalf, getting $125 and $60 for gas on two occasions. She therefore lets the Yang family use her oven from time to time to save on their own gas bill.

When Xi cannot solve a problem, she sometimes brings it to Vue. When Vue is stuck, he turns to me or to another American in his church. He had done this on many occasions with puzzling bills or difficult homework. Sometimes, a favor is returned in kind, as illustrated above with Xi and her gas money. Other requests for help cause conflict.

Vue had been complaining for a couple of days about a man who wanted him to write a fraudulent letter to welfare. Lo, case-worker/client, co-tenant or urban neighbor pose new possibilities and pressures for different kinds of interaction in this new setting.

## LITERACY AS A TOOL USED BY THOSE WHO MEDIATE BETWEEN CULTURE GROUPS

Members of Vue's church feel their way as they accommodate the hefty new population of refugees. Incorporating the Hmong into religious life was a priority. On any given Sunday, one or several Hmong couples are baptized, becoming full members of the "church family".

Vue used to spend several hours each Saturday studying the bible with the pastor. Thus prepared, he led Sunday school bible lessons in Hmong, for those who could not understand English. The group consists mostly of new arrivals, women, and older men. With the Lao bible and English bible close at hand, Vue is able to synthesize each lesson to convey to the Hmong.

Until their language mastery improves, newcomers depend on those like Vue to open a sort of life line with the church, permitting exchange of information and participation that would otherwise be impossible. In a conversation with me over a year ago, the pastor confided his difficulties at that time because the Hmong leader/translator moved with many in his clan to resettle in Rhode Island. To his relief, Vue has moved into this position, bringing "wisdom" from the American religious leader into the world of the Hmong, and providing a way for them to become part of the church community.

On the other hand, when Vue does his short reading for the whole congregation, he is, in one sense, bringing a bit of Hmong culture over for consumption by Americans. His seat next to the pastor during the service, and his name printed in the service program legitimize both the task, and Vue himself as mediator in such an exchange.

Because of his accessibility through language, I suspect, Vue has been called by several homeowning congregation members offering him small wages for work in their homes. When he is unable to comply with all offers with his one precious Saturday, he is usually free to supply the name of an alternate.

Vue's role as mediator extends past the boundaries of the church. During my homestay, a social worker from a neighboring church called, asking him to translate a sign from English to Hmong that requested users of a free clothing room limit what they took. She had gotten his name as an able writer, and living six blocks away, had asked Vue to claim that Lo lived with him in order to pick up a welfare check at Vue's address. I arrived one afternoon to find Lo and Vue in frank discussion. When Lo left, Vue was angry. "He want me to cheat for him...he not my relative, he not help me anything. He make trouble for me". Vue felt that the request was inappropriate, and that it jeapordized his own standing with welfare. I advised him not to do it, as had another American.

I'm not sure why Vue was called upon for this favor. He is neither a neighbor, nor a clan member. I suspect it may be related to the fact that Vue is among few literate household heads who would be able to perform the task. This remains to be better understood.

Vue later received a call from Vang X., who he explains, is "boss of the Hmong in Philadelphia". Because Vang was among the first to arrive in the city and become quickly bilingual, he was hired by a social service agency that resettled hundreds of Hmong families. Thus, Vang is the prime mediator between the caseworkers and the Hmong population in the area. Not coincidentally, I'm told, the X. family (clan) members seem to fare best in matters that require attention from the social service system. For example, Vue said that when he first arrived, Vang called the police when Lee was in labor. He did not take the time to accompany the couple to the hospital as he did for certain other families. Speaking very little English at the time, Vue felt helpless when the doctors decided to perform a Cesarean on Lee. He is sure that it could have been avoided with the right advocacy. In Laos, Vang would appropriately be expected to aid members of his own clan. As a caseworker in Philadelphia, he is seen by Americans as a representative of "the Hmong" and is asked to be an advocate for members of many clans. The old and new expectations do not always harmonize.

Vang, then, asked Vue to do this favor for Lo. While listening to the Americans on one hand, Vue felt, I suspect, trapped by powerful social and political pressures from within the Hmong community. The dilemma had no clear solution. As the phone continued to ring, and Vue's homework lay neglected, he shouted in exasperation, "Too many calls! Too many questions!" With that, he pulled the phone wires out of the wall and sat down to do his homework, complaining, "Everybody want something from me!"

From these examples, it becomes clear that decoding and composing documents play an important role in economic survival. Those who have literacy skills must use them to gain and maintain benefits, and those who don't must often rely on those who do. Who may rely on whom is problematic. Where dependence relationships once resided within families and clans, new categories such as contacted him immediately. That evening, he put aside his homework, and wrote and rewrote the message, until he was satisfied that it was well done. The social worker picked it up that evening, thanking him for the effort.

This woman then, a community worker, depended on Vue to convey information to Hmong people using the services of her own church. He is therefore becoming a mediator for the neighborhood as well as for his own church.

Vue spends time deliberately cultivating relationships with Americans. Before I moved in with him, he would often call me on the telephone for no apparent reason but to chat. One afternoon during the homestay when I returned to his apartment, I found him going systematically through his memo-pad phone directory calling each American, one by one. The content of each conversation was more or less the same, as he asked each person what was "up" and spoke of his own state of affairs. My impression was that he enjoys trying to keep his American "friends", including teachers, church members, (and oddballs like ethnographers) engaged as long as possible. His decision with Lee to allow me to live with them for a month was another daring move to allow an American into his world.

Incorporation of Americans into Vue's life surely has its benefits, but it must also have its price. Six months before I met Vue and Lee, I had asked one of my students and his family about the same homestay arrangement. My student had agreed, but subsequently had to reneg on the invitation, he explained, because of a dissenting brother-in-law.

After I moved in with Vue and Lee, this student began "accidentally" kicking Vue repeatedly during soccer games. His wife asked suspicous questions of Lee at church. Vue and Lee asked which Hmong people I had told about the homestay - and asked that I keep the arrangement private. I didn't know whether the conflict arose out of jealousy, suspicion, or some other factor.

At one point, I asked Vue and Lee if they wanted me to leave. They assured me that I could stay, but their request for my discretion made it clear what a sensitive issue this was. There is surely ground for much investigation to better understand what is gained and what is sacrificed to become a bridge between two culture groups.

## LITERACY AS A TOOL ASSOCIATED WITH ARTICULATING NEW SOCIAL STATUS IN A CHANGING SOCIAL ORDER

### The New Year: Tradition and Change

Last November, my oldest student, 58-year-old Jou, invited me to join her in New Year's preparations. She led me to a home on Powelton Avenue where 30 Hmong women were crowded into one room, wrapping themselves with colorful sashes over black velvet garb. Coin and silver-bedecked children ran in and out from the street, playing with each oter. Jou's daughter helped the other women bind their hair in dark turbans with striped bands criss-crossed on their heads. One lovely teenager; heavily laden with coins and beads, with black velvet wrapped around her calves, threw on a shiny green silk jacket over her dress. Across the back, in large letters, was printed: "ROLLER DISCO".

A couple of months before the New Year celebration, a meeting of the Hmong Association was called. A couple of hundred Hmong went by bus to gather at the Indochinese Center. The Association is headed by Vang (the Hmong social worker), who is in his thirties. Jou's son showed me a flyer, in Hmong, with instructions and news of committee responsibilities for different aspects of the affair. It outlined financial arrangements, job responsibilities, and subsequent meeting times.

In the hills of Laos, New Year was an event anticipated all year. Heads of clans in each village, always the eldest men, met to arrange the event. Apparently New Year's festivals were planned at different times for different places, in order that villages might reciprocally invite one another as they took turns hosting the activities. Young men and women would line up in rows facing each other, throwing back and forth a cloth ball that the girls had made from their sewing scraps. Boys would sing, serenading, beginning a process of courtship that would become manifest with a rash of marriages following the New Year.

How has literacy as a new communicative mode played a part in changing the social order? Previously, meetings would be called by word of mouth by a household head. Responsibilities were delegated and carried out accordingly. As Hmong people find themselves spread through the city, written materials become useful to organize meetings and arrange for bus transportation. As information sharing begins to depend on a literate mode, what happens to the role of elders in leadership? How will decisions be made when young people are those that have direct access to information and resources?

On the second day of the New Year festivities, costumed young men and women lined up facing one another on a strip of park grass in Philadelphia's Germantown. They threw green tennis balls back and forth. Jou complained that the boys didn't know the words to the songs anymore. How can a Hmong boy impress a girl with blessings and prayers he has memorized? These skills will no longer be be crucial to prove himself a good husband. In an environment where information is recorded on paper, what traits will be sought or desired in a mate?

In the first sections of this paper, I have given some examples to illustrate how boundaries of interaction change as Hmong newcomers encounter their literate environment. As a young man with even limited literacy skills, Vue finds himself in the sometimes desireable, sometimes confusing position of helper, negotiating for himself and others with American institutions. In the second section, it is posited that those same skills enable Vue to act as mediator, facilitating communication between Hmong and Americans through a variety of tasks and activities. I suggest further that as a result of these functions and uses of literacy, Vue is gradually changing his status in a changing social order.

When I first met Vue, he complained that he had no family members nearby. His mother is in Minnesota, and his brother and sister remain in Thailand. To illustrate his plight, he commented that when he held a party for his first son, many people came to eat and enjoy themselves. His invitation has not been reciprocated with invitations to parties that have been held in the neighborhood. He feels isolated and exploited, apart from his family and clan.

## The Craft Sale

It takes little time for an outside observer to discover the talents of Hmong women. Returning to the apartment in the afternoons, I would often find Lee rocking her youngest child on her back in a brightly embroidered baby carrier, while sewing decorative squares. Characterized by tiny precise stitches, reverse applique, and stunning colors, the handiwork is awesome. To my delight, Lee often works with her sister and mother, as well as other passers through. All are happy to chatter or sit quietly as I join them with my crocheting. From such gatherings, I imagined a party in which friends could come to look at the crafts, and Hmong women could display their pieces for sale. So it was planned. The party succeeded to the tune of $700 of collective sales. The money was distributed to the individual artists whose pieces were sold.

I suggested to Vue and Lee that each woman contribute one or two dollars for a kitty to cover refreshments for the party, and to start some collective savings for renting craft fair tables, or even eventually saving for a storefront. Vue spoke out: "Hmong people can each pay for food at the party, but not to save money together. My name 'Yang', I help 'Yang'. We don't trust money together."

There were the divisions, starkly clear. Family helps family, clan helps within clan. Cooperation was only possible to repay the American authority. An interesting conflict then arose. By miscommunication between myself and another American who was keeping books, money was not collected, even for reimbursing me for the refreshments. I brought it to Vue's attention. "Don't worry", he comforted me. He would collect the moeny from the people in Sunday school. He could not collect from the others: "They not obey me", he commented. "But people in my church, I think we can help you". A new unit of cooperation is being formed - members of a congregation who can be influenced to act by a young man who may or may not share their name.

Vue once commented to me, "I don't have family here - I have my church. People help me, give me a desk, dresser, chair..." Indeed, the church has been a source of furniture and clothing for Lee and Vue. Individual congregation members have, during my homestay, lent a space heater when the heat was broken, moved to investigate the delay in bringing Vue's brother over from Thailand, among other things. They have provided these things for which, in the past, Vue could only turn to "family" (clan) for dependable aid.

It remains to be seen, how, as newcomers adapt to their new urban environment, literacy will take its place within the communicative economy. Likewise, as the new mode of communication enters the social fabric, we can look on with interest at the impact of literacy, on the process by which relationships between people evolve and change.

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Note: On Being an Ethnographer

It would be easiest to say that I wanted to understand my students in order to be more effective as a literacy teacher, that I wanted to know how they processed things, what they could use, and what was important - to make the classroom work.

The truth is, however, that I became an English teacher because I wanted to find out how these people made sense of the world - not the other way around! Peasant farms, once organizing their lives around the rhythms of subsistence survival, find themselves in a foreign literate city. How do they manage?

To many of the Hmong I have known, I am an English teacher. I help them unravel the language, tell them about their new city, and help decipher bills and other strange documents. To Vue and Lee, I have been a frequent visitor, an unsuccessful language learner, an appreciative consumer of Hmong food, a source of rides, homework help, and tickets to the Spectrum wrestling matches. I have also been a hostess to parties where Hmong women can sell their crafts - one who does not understand the relationships between actors in the "Hmong Community" - my own category that may not be shared by them. I have also been a source of conflict for Vue and Lee, whose hospitality has caused various tensions for them with others in the community. I don't know what other things I am to them. A source of favors? A social worker? An enigmatic curiosity? A lone person to take in and nurture? A source of language input and help? A friend?

To me, Vue and Lee have been many things. They are model survivors. From Laos, across the Mekond, in boring dirty refugee camps, to Powelton where they are robbed, and thier neighbor's children beaten by angry black kids - they somehow continue with gentleness, courtesy, and good humor. They are a keyhole into a complex world that I have barely glimpsed. They are young people, making decisions about how to balance old and new. They have been hosts who have fed me, housed me, invited me to sleep next to them when it was cold. They are fun companions for watching wrestling, and they are family for sharing good meals. They are newcomers who need tips about getting around, and they are new language learners who can use my help in some areas.

I suspect that they have given me far more than I can give them. The "homestay" is over, but the feeling of home remains. In response to their obvious hurt/disappointment when I prepared to move back home, I left my nightgown for occasional overnight visits. That seemed to appease their suspicion that I was pulling out forever. Indeed, if luck is with me, I will know Vue and Lee for a long time - and have the good fortune to continue a process with them of having fun together, sharing things, figuring each other out, and learning from each other more about the world and how it can look from different eyes.

# A PARENT-RESEARCHER COMMENTS ON THE RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Andrea Robinson

## A PARENT-RESEARCHER COMMENTS

When it became known that the University of Pennsylvania was interested in working at our school, many parents anticipated their arrival with curiosity and eagerness for what they perceived to be a boon for the school. Others, including my husband and I had mixed feelings. We questioned the wisdom of welcoming a group foreign to our community and lifestyle to probe and study us as Africans and aborigines had been studied. We were wary of the notives behind the study and fearful of how the results would be used. Although our community is not as close-knit as some, we still valued our privacy. Other studies had been done of Black communities which highlighted negative and inferior aspects of Black life. We were concerned that our community's struggles to survive and progress would be pictured in the same light. In addition, we were hesitant to invite anything that would interfere with the workings of our children's school.

A public school's success depends on a number of factors among these are: the degree of freedom allowed by central and district administrations; the daring, imagination and expertise of the school principal, the skill and dedication of the individual teachers and the extent of the involvement of the students' parents.

The importance of parental involvement in the education of their children has come increasingly into focus as evidenced by the Parent Partnership and other programs initiated by the school district of Philadelphia and the federal government to upgrade public education. Most of these programs are designed to demonstrate to parents how they can augment and continue the education process at home. Children whose parents are involved appear to have an advantage. They come to school better prepared, are more achievement oriented and are consciously or unconsciously favored by teachers who are aware of their parents' interest.

Our school has made special use of this parental interest by utilizing it as a basis for an academics plus program. Parents of the children who are invited to participate in this program must show that they are willing to share in the education of their children. Homework assignments must be endoresed, appropriate behavior must be insured, and summer refresher work must be completed. The parents at our school are so pleased with this program that long before the entry level for the program is reached, fourth grade, they encourage their children to shape up and work for admittance.

Parental involvement at our school goes beyond educational reinforcement at home. There is a nucleus of parents who are concerned with the workings of the school itself. They volunteer their services in the Home and School Association, in mothers' groups, in the office, library and classrooms. These parents are interested in school policies, teacher integrity, and the welfare of the children in the community as a whole. Penn's proposed study, therefore, concerned us all.

My husband and I could see possible advantages in having the University work with the school. We have four bright children with promising futures. We wanted the best education available for them, but our financial situation narrowed our possibilities to the public school system. Our school is one of two elementary schools in our immediate neighborhood, and it has proven to be a good choice. The building facilities are attractive and relatively new. Two reading skills centers, a math resource room, self-teaching machines and well-stocked library are some of the componenets that help to provide an enriched learning environment. The teachers are friendly and motivating, encouraging parental particpation on all levels of the education proces.. Many children flourish in this atmosphere, but others struggle to pass.

The prospect of educators from the University of Pennsylvania offered hope for those children who had to struggle and broadened horizons for the others. A close look at our school could shed light on the reasons some children were failing. The parents of these children were desparately seeking answers. Many parents had little formal education and, despite programs like Parent Partnership, couldn't see how to help their children at home.

Some parents, like my husband and myself, were fortunate in that we both had good formal educations. My husband is a graduate student at St. Joseph's University in the field of criminal justice. His undergraduate work was in secondary education, and he is qualified to teach social studies and Spanish. My undergraduate field was psychology, and I am currently enrolled in a school psychology program. We both became concerned with education, its methods and problems, when our own children started school. Patient work at home had provided the children with an early start in reading and math. When our oldest son entered school, I became a classroom volunteer and later a reading aide. This allowed me to observe teachers' methods, classroom procedures, and my children's behavior. Teachers and staff offered suggestions and encouraged the educational work we continued to do at home. Consquently, our children are doing well. Still, we wanted more. We were well aware that children in some private schools and in other parts of the country were being offered a richer, more diverse education. These children would one day compete with our own for college berths and jobs. Penn's interest in our school could lead to innovations and improvements that could rovide our children with a competitive edge.

Beyond the immediate advantage to our own children, Penn's interest offered other possibilities. Many negative reports have been produced on inner city schools. Poor national standardized scores, delinquency, parental indifference and low motivation have all been over publicized. Little has been said of the many inner city schools that have hard working achievers who, with their parents' support, are striving to elevate their educational, social and economic levels. Penn's publication of their findings would spotlight one such school.

In addition, some elements of society would be made aware that poverty and environment are handicaps that do not necessarily predict failure. Those who emerge from the inner city as successes are often looked upon as the exception. However, there are many children, especially at the elementary school level, who are achievers and have the potential to be a success. Public recognition of these children through studies such as Penn's could lower the barriers of prejudice.

The positive aspects of the University's involvement at our school were very persuasive. The researchers were welcomed and were quietly assimilated into the daily workings of the school. Their demeanor was so unobtrusive that few parents, students or teachers were aware of their presence. Our fears of rude probing, proved to be unjustified. The researchers' pleasant, friendly attitude put everyone at ease. No one expressed feeling discomfort at being the object of a study.

Perry Gilmore, in particular, became an integral part of the classes she was observing. Her presence in the classroom was regarded as supportive rather than intrusive. Observations of students and procedures were shared openly with teachers. This led to discussions that helped to clarify and provide new meaning to student/teacher interactions. The researcher's approach was devoid of the affectations on the patronizing expert or of the prying fault-finder. Her manner reassured teachers, and friendships developed. Teachers willingly talked of plans and objectives. They valued her contributions.

The students, at first quiet and reserved in Perry's presence soon welcomed the researcher into their inner circle. She was invited to join in the games and activities she had come to observe. Some students allowed a degree of intimacy that is usually reserved for their peers. This researcher's open, unassuming method of appraoch had inspired an atmosphere of trust and cooperation.

I realize that resarchers utilize various methods and styles in pursuing their studies; however, I hope that publication of Penn's methodology in this particular ethnographic study will lead to future use of this appraoch in minority communities. Fear and suspicion are natural reactions to investigation by prominent institutions of society. Especially when the subjects view themselves as being outside of the mainstream of that society.

Information gathered under these circumstances can often be misleading. Subjects concerned with putting their "best foot forward" supply data that makes them look good. In addition, subjects anxiously provide information they think the researcher is seeking. Researchers, unconsciously reacting to this tension in the atmosphere, misinterpret what they see and feel. As a result, data is confounded and a false impression of the community emerges.

The frank honesty of Penn's researchers produced frank, honest resposnes. The principal and some of the teachers involved in the study were asked to review and comment on the work that had been done. As a parent, I also was asked to evaluate and offer my views on the research. Validation through collaboration may not be a new idea, but its use in this instance initiated a new cooperative spirit that will extend to future studies in the community.

# A TEACHER-RESEARCHER COMMENTS ON THE RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Immani Brown

# A TEACHER-RESEARCHER COMMENT

I was reading an abstract for a paper to be presented at the University of Pennsylvania Ethnography in Education Research Forum (1981) and the final paragraph gave me the idea of where I wanted to begin/or just what it was that wanted to say to you. I quote from her writing: "Though the researcher later realized the need to find the questions...." I underlined, drew a box around the phrase "find the questions." We as teacher, parents, and principals, etc. have the questions. Myriads of questions that are worth qualified, experienced answers of researchers and as ethnographers I see you as helping us to find the answers and sometimes even more questions.

From my experience in an ethnographic study for almost two years, it seems to me that one of the major differences between the traditional approach to research and the ethnographic approach to research could possibly boil down to two words. They are on and with. The traditional approach leaves you feeling something was done on or to you. You may not even be quite sure what it was that was done (I have been involved in both kinds of research). You feel that from some lofty throne on academic high came the word and the word must be good. You begin to wonder about the must be. On the other hand the ethnographic appraoch to research is done with people. Already you have a feeling of being part of something.

There is also an exchange in the process. The researcher gains information and knowledge about himself and the project. The researched (me) has a chance to do exactly the same. All involved question, learn, change - if change is needed and the questions get answered, the project gets done and the papers get written. It takes longer to arrive but the process/or road traveled seems so much more humane.

It seems that one part of the philosophical approach of ethnographic researcher is that one comes with few preconceived ideas about what the answer(s) are going to be. There seems to be an elasticity that allows one to take down what is happening here and now, then later one analyzes it, codes it or decodes, finds out whose theory is at work there (that's important to researchers), but you come back to the researched (me) with some more questions that are relevant to what is happening in this place at this time. It (E.A.R.) seems to allow for the possibility that wrong questions were being asked to find out about x, y, or z. It allows you to come back and try it again.

The E.A.R. is a more cumbersome approach (lots of papers, tapes, and sorting) to research, but again it allows the person or persons being researched to share in the learning process. My students who were directly involved and my class as a whole were able to gain experiences that they will remember and will have learned something from. They'll remember things like taking a "researcher" shopping, to their church, to a movie of their choice. They'll have learned in the process how to relate to an adult outside of their own community and in this case outside of their own race. For me it was a chance to have some questions raised about the whys, hows, and wherefore that I hadn't thought about in words for a long time. It felt good when the questions were raised that the answers were still valid and that my approach to teaching still made sense. As a result I also modified a few things, threw out a couple of things, and became stronger yet in some of my beliefs about what works in a classroom. These benefits are not reaped from the traditional approach to research. I felt that when the researcher was finished she had gotten what she came for, I was able to benefit from it, and my class benefitted also.

So often as teachers we feel that things are put "on" us. This is not a good feeling and it's seldom verbalized by teachers, but when the word comes down from academics on high about how this and that are going to work in your classroom and your years of experience say it may or may not. Much research/findings/programs/etc. that are handed down this way are dealt with in like manner, the round file if you can and if you can't you go through with little interest or belief it will work for you.

There is a need for meaningful research to be done where the questions come from within the structure to be researched whether that structure is a family, church, school, or larger institution.

Heretofore research has seemingly forgotten about smallness and uniqueness. The process is to start on a small group or groups, moving perhaps later to larger groups, for the purpose of extrapolating information to apply to even larger groups. There is a need I'm sure for this process but for sure it should not be the only way. How about finding out which method or approach would work best in a particular situation and use that one. Perhaps some research should/can only be applied to certain groups. Perhaps variations are needed for other groups.

I would like to leave you to think about this. It would seem to me that with all the educational research available to apply or that has been applied, it (public education) is still not working for large numbers of its clients. To the degree that you are able to find funding/money to allow you to do this kind of humane and personalized research is the degree to which more things will work for more people.

# APPENDIX A

# READING AND WRITING IN THE REAL WORLD: EXPLORATIONS INTO THE CULTURE OF LITERACY

David M. Smith

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# READING AND WRITING IN THE REAL WORLD:
# EXPLORATIONS INTO THE CULTURE OF LITERACY

## INTRODUCTION

Rather than looking at reading and writing primarily as cognitive processes, or as skills with socio-cultural dimensions, it is fruitful to view them as fundamentally socio-cultural phenomena. While the two approaches may not necessarily be contradictory, the latter perspective has, until fairly recently, not been characteristic of most research or practice in American education. This view, however, underlies several recent studies of classroom interaction and of literacy in homes and communities. (For example, Hymes et al, 1978-81 in West Philadelphia, Smith et al, ongoing in Philadelphia, Heath, five year ethnographic study in the Southeastern U. S., Liechter, McDermottt, et al, 1980-81 in New York.)

This approach, at the outset, mandates a definition of "the real world" different from that which would be expected. This phrase, as used here, does not refer only to literacy activities which are confined to out-of-school contexts. The social context, school or otherwise, is not simply a setting to display a set of congitive skills and knowledge which remain constant across settings, but is a key ingredient in the literacy event itself. So central is context to understanding literacy that it is easy to find that what counts as reading in one context will not in others. Therefore, I take reading and writing in the real world to refer to the meanings of literacy in the cultural contexts in which individuals or groups of individuals live their lives.

Whereas cognition has become a central analytic construct in traditional school-centric views of literacy, understanding reading and writing in the real world requires an examination of the culture of literacy. Though this notion which becomes our primary construct in the present discussion, is defined more precisely as the discussion progresses, a simple difinition is in order at this point.

The culture of literacy refers to the values, beliefs, techniques, skills and social statuses associated with reading and writing. Every school develops its own culture (or subculture) of literacy. By the same token, every community of which schools are a segment, has also evolved its subculture of literacy.

This use of culture does not imply that there are no cultural traits that subcultures hold in common. Quite the contrary, one way to conceptualize subculture is to see it is a specific adaptive variation that its members make on a small set of underlying cultural themes. This seems to be the case in the subcultures of literacy described to date.

Dispite variations among individual schools' cultures of literacy, there are striking similarities. Some of these can be traced to the long tradition of viewing reading and writing as cognitive processes where the important activity is carried out in the heads of individuals. (See Mehan, 1979 and McDermott, 1977). For example, it is hard to find a school that doesn't value formal aspects of reading or writing behavior nearly as much as the decoding or encoding of meaning or that doesn't count the social deportment of readers and writers in evaluating literacy behavior. Furthermore, the vast majority of schools expect the development of literacy skills to occur in a specific sequence of stages; typically simple labelling is succeeded by the ability to deal with "what" questions and this stage in turn leads to the acquisition of higher order analytic skills.[1]

In the remainder of this paper I describe some of what we have found from our explorations into the culture of literacy. When possible, these findings are supported by or related to recent research conducted from a similar perspective. A final section sketches some of the implications these findings have for educational practices.

## Meanings of Reading and Writing in the Real World

In the real world, reading and writing can be viewed as individial or group adaptive responses, as important roles in the construction of the social order, and as negotiable commodities.

Reading and Writing as Adaptive Responses. Reading and writing, conventional wisdom holds, require certain knowledge and skills that must be taught. This belief, which underlies much educational practice, is reflected in our search for improved pedagogical techniques as well as in the central place methods courses hold in teacher training programs. Ultimately, it represents a kind of "magical thinking." (Emig) Neither the literature describing literacy in other societies (Cf., for example, Scribner and Cole, 1978) nor recent research in our own society supports this belief.

For the children she studied, Heath reports,

> ...comprehension was the context rather than the outcome of learning to read. They read to learn something, obtain a desired item or action, and in these situations, they learned to read without formal instruction or the reading-readiness activities generally used by school-oriented parents with preschoolers. (Heath, 1981, p. 9, Emphasis in the original)

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[1] Heath, 1981, describes two communities where the preschool child's literacy context leads to either a truncation and limitation of this process or to the development of a different one. Both are shown to lead to problems in school.

This conclusion comes as no surprise to anthropologists. In an environment as literate as ours, where it is virtually impossible to escape regular encounters with printed language, learning to read and write are natural occurrences--"as natural as learning to speak."[2] Virtually every normal child brought up in the United States, left to his/her own devices, will do some reading and writing as an adaptive response to the environment.

In this view, people read or write only insofar as these activities fill perceived needs. The reality, predictably, is more complex. Need perception is a highly individual matter, reflecting largely the idiosyncracies of personal biographies and histories.

Nevertheless, this assumption leads to provocative and fruitful research. Black children, Ogbu argues persuasively, frequently do not learn to read and write as readily as their white counterparts precisely because their real life experiences bely the promise of school and of mainstream society that acquiring literacy skills will provide the means to move up and out. They do not remain disadvantaged because they fail to become literate. It is the other way round. The realities of the social caste structure in which they are trapped not only makes acquiring school literacy futile, but probably also counterproductive to any attempt to breech the imposed ceiling. (Ogbu, 1980)

On the other hand, Irish working-class families studied in New York City perceived school success to be the only way out of the community (McDermott and Morrison, n.d.). As a result their children were sent to parochial schools at great sacrifice, and every effort was made by parents to see that school expectations were met, even when these expectations ran counter to deeply held values. For example, sometimes teachers would assign homework writing exercises as punishment for misbehavior. Although one mother felt that this practice might have the effect of turning her child off to writing, she always insisted that he do it. (McDermott and Morison, 1981, n.d.)

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[2] Yetta Goodman. Remarks made at the Conference on Young Children's Use of Language, Rutgers University, May 1980.

Watkins encountered families who similarly perceive the acquisition of school literacy and hence the meeting of school expectations as crucial to social advancement. In their attempts to meet these expectations these families ran into difficulties of a slightly different nature. They were admonished to provide "literate environments" (the particulars of which were spelled out by the school), to read to and with their children, and to check but not correct their homework assignments. In the first place it was never clear where the line between checking and helping should be drawn. More disturbing, however, was the value dissonance this directive created. Their experiences warned them that sending children to school with "incorrect" or "messy" homework frequently resulted in teachers viewing them as illiterate or non-caring parents. Moreover, they ran considerable risk (at least in their own minds) that their children would make negative comparisons between themselves and their teachers if they appeared not to recognize improperly rendered assignments. This was particularly a difficult issue given the strong community value on propriety in act and appearance.

Viewing reading and writing as adaptive responses to perceived needs not only leads us to find evidence of the differential acquisition of literacy skills and concomitant reactions to school expectation, it also sheds light on a variety of literacy related problems. Few educators view the definition of reading and writing as problemmatical. Students are classified as readers or non-readers and writers or non-writers without much thought about what this classification means. Similarly, on a given occasion, a particular student will be seen as either engaging in one of these literacy behaviors or not. I think, however, that such demarcations cannot be so easily made.

Fiering (1981) took as the starting point for her study one teacher's insistence that her "lower track students did not write," a major source of frustration in her teaching. Fiering, however, found the classroom to be a beehive of writing activity. Students wrote notes to each other, reminders to themselves, designed word games, drew up contracts, and made lists. When the researcher discussed these observations with the teacher, she initially dismissed it with, "Oh, I don't consider that to be writing."

That the teacher chose to count some behaviors as writing, while excluding others that appeared to be similar, came as no surprise. Her "definition" of writing, which she shares with many educators and parents, precluded her categorizing certain student behaviors as writing. A major goal of ethnographic analysis is to explicate the frameworks or definitions used by members of a culture, and thus to describe how certain people see the world and why.[3]

The fact that teachers count only some reading and writing behaviors as actual reading and writing is crucial for understanding the problems involved in describing the culture of school literacy. What counts as reading or writing in school is usually determined by what is taught. Tests are designed for the display not of what may have been learned naturally, but what the teacher believes has been taught. Lessons are planned to systematically lead students through stages that the teacher establishes. Ideally this progression is based on research findings reflecting the experiences of a "representative" sample of learners.

The effects of this counting-only-what-is taught syndrome on the acquisition and display of reading and writing skills is farreaching. A child coming to school, able as Heath's subjects were to "read to learn," may soon find that what s/he can do doesn't count as reading. It isn't enough to see words in context and deduce their meanings. Before one can "read" one must learn that, in some mysterious way, print tracks sound, for example. And this is only the beginning. A student will realize that simply encoding meaning in printed symbols, even if the meaning can be retrieved by a reader, doesn't necessarily count as writing. He may have to learn that this print must proceed from left to right, be in a straight line and meet a number of other formal or functional expectations of the teacher.

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[3] In the Fiering study subsequent investigation revealed the formal properties defining writing that counted as well as enough of the social organizational configuration of the classroom to explain some of the reasons why this particular way of counting was functional.

Frequently, in order to count as reading or writing, the actions themselves must be accompanied by keeping the feet on the floor, assuming an appropriate facial expression, and maintaining total silence. Also, what counts for reading or writing for one student may not for another.

Beginning Black school readers from Tracktown (Heath, 1980) apparently find themselves penalized on reading readiness tests because they cannot answer the "what" question presented by flat, two-dimensional, highly stylized stimuli, even though their past experiences seem to have prepared them to deal with "higher order" analogic questions. The latter skills, presumably, would be overlooked (not counted) because they occur out of expected sequence.

The point is simple. The school culture of literacy typically leads teachers not to count displays of literacy competencies when those do not conform to the definitions and expectations implied in what is taught. Indisputably, these practices are functional, given the sorting role schools play in society. Crucial to educators is the awareness that definitions of literacy vary and are functions of the particular culture (or subculture) of literacy characteristic of schools or communities.

## The role of reading and writing in constructing the social order.

This essay looks for the answers to school related literacy problems in social organizational rather than in strictly cognitive processes. From a culture of literacy perspective, reading and writing themselves, as cultural phenomena, are important to the construction of social organization.

Culture is not like a suit of clothes to be put on or discarded at will. People don't see the world in a certain way simply because they choose to. They see it the way it has been presented to them, and confirmed by experience. Decisions are made with faith that things are the way they appear through one's cultural lenses.

The culture of literacy, as a way of seeing reading and writing, is no less important. We go to extremes to see that teachers, in their recruitment, training and assimilation to a school, accept the school culture of literacy. Teachers' "ways of counting" reading and writing behaviors are not simply matters of choice. They reflect how, from their perspective, things are. Conflicts between cultures, opposing ways of seeing, are only resolved at great risk to the individuals committed to them. This, of course, goes far to explain the frustration both of teachers who can't get kids to "learn" and of reformers who can't get teachers to change.

The power of culture is central in understanding the role of literacy in the construction of social organization. Micro-ethnographic efforts at explaining the process of constructing the social organization of classrooms or lessons have made this clear. (Cf., Mehan, n.d.; McDermott, 1977; Schultz and Florio, 1981; White, 1980) For example, students are commonly grouped or tracked according to reading level. Even in classrooms where the grouping for reading is heterogeneous, teachers' behaviors toward individuals are generally affected by the "known" differences.

Public belief in the importance of developing the kinds of literacy skills presumably offered by schooling are strong. People regularly make decisions about where to live on the basis of the availability of good schools. Literacy is, of course, not the only issue prompting these decisions, but it is fundamental. When, for example, a parent explained that she could not enroll her son in the public inner city school because he was "so middle class that he would never survive," her concern was not only for his physical safety but for the quality of preparation he would receive.

Not all parents have options. Some simply cannot afford to shop for a school that meets their expectations, though they may feel just as strongly about the importance of their children developing literacy skills. They are, however, forced to develop a different strategy for assuring it. Some attempt to influence the school. For a variety of reasons, mostly related to their relative powerlessness that created the predicament in the first place, such efforts are seldom very satisfying. A more typical response is reactive, and they restructure their lives to conform to school expectations.

The discovery of "community" and its role in schooling may be one of the most significant results of researchers' attention to out-of-school contexts. Obviously, any explanation for the roles literacy plays in real life must take into account the total repetory of knowledge available "for people to focus themselves on." (McDermott and Morison, 1981) This means attending to the larger community which both families and schools share in and create.

In literacy research, communities have usually been categorized as school-oriented or non-school-oriented. School-oriented includes those in which the families' culture of literacy and the school's are similar and where parents consciously attempt to inculcate appropriate skills, knowledge and attitudes in their children. They also frequently make sure their children enroll in schools that will work for them. Our research suggests refining this model, a refinement that will take us a step toward the kind of ethnology of schooling called for by Hymes. (Hymes, 1980)

At the risk of oversimplification, I suggest that three configurations of school-community culture types can be identified, based on the way behaviors and attitudes toward literacy are organized. These types can be labelled reactive (where the community organizes its culture of literacy around school expectations), proactive (where the school looks to the community for clues as to how its approach to literacy should be organized), and unrelated (where the families and schools develop their notions in relative isolation one from the other).

The communities investigated to date seem to fit in the following categories:

COMMUNITY CULTURE OF LITERACY TYPES

| | |
|---|---|
| Reactive | Kingsland (McDermott and Morison, N.Y.C.) |
| | Shortridge (Watkins, West Philadelphia) |
| | Roadville (Heath, Southeastern United States) |
| Proactive | Suburban Public (GSE Graduate Students) |
| | University Private (U. of Pen Professors) |
| | [4]School-Oriented (Heath) |
| Unrelated | [5]Stockton (Ogbu) |
| | Tracktown (?) (Heath, Southeastern United States) |

This table throws in relief several interesting "facts." First, consistent distinctions do not seem to obtain between white and Black communities. Stockton and Tracktown are both Black, and, presumably for the reasons discussed earlier, families from both know that school promises of mobility based on literacy are not to be taken at face value. However, Shortridge is also Black, and here the parents, very much like the Irish families in Kingsland, are careful to organize their literacy activities in reaction to school expectations. Apparently, they accept the school promise--or premise.

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[4] Heath does not claim the status of community for "school-oriented" families in her paper. She does, however, contrast school-oriented families discussed in the literature with her Roadville and Tracktown communities. Much of this literature reports the experiences of affluent, professional researchers who either studied their own or colleague families.

[5] Ogbu, in the paper cited here, does not claim that he is talking exclusively about Stockton as a community type. However, he does indicate that many of his contentions are grounded in his Stockton research.

These divisions do not coincide either with public and private boundaries. Kingsland is parochial, university professors use private schools and, we can assume that Heath's school-oriented families sent their children to both private and public schools.

Quite possibly, an understanding of the culture of literacy, reflecting the ways families, individuals and schools organize their literacy related concerns, can only be found by looking at the community as a whole. Schools and families interact and relate to each other in unique ways to create a culture of literacy. This process must be examined if the meanings of reading and writing in the real world are to be understood clearly.

Reading and Writing as negotiable commodities. American educators are obsessed with literacy, particularly reading. Conversations with principals, teachers and parents about schools almost inevitably turn to the reading level of students. Principals routinely judge the effectiveness of their administrations by changes in the school's annual reading score ranking. Parents evaluate teachers, and teachers parenting, on how well and how fast students learn to read and write.

Our society's experience is only unique in detail. Historians have long warned us that literacy can have different effects and has been put to a wide number of uses by societies in other times and places. It has been used to democratize by breaking up monopolies on knowledge and, by being guarded as the property of a few, has also been used to strengthen or foster elite classes. In our own time we have seen it used to disenfranchise voters and to unfairly deny employment. We have also seen political reformers, such as Paulo Freire, promote it as a powerful means for liberation.

To see the full range of uses to which reading and writing can be put requires considering them within the context of a culture of literacy. Such uses vary from community to community and include the availability of the material paraphenelia of literacy, notions of selfworth and one's ability to learn, values attached to the uses of time, and networks of social paths either out of the community or to positions of importance within it. The relationship of the school to the rest of the community is crucial, especially the status of the principal, his knowledge of the community moires and his notions about literacy.

The remainder of this section will present one case of a school community in Philadelphia. We will see how the principal and community families negotiate a bona fide social contract for the exchange of literacy skills.

The Community. Shortridge, though a Black community, hardly qualifies as a typical inner city Ghetto. Characterized by extreme social and economic diversity, it has both a number of very poor families and a number of socially mobile families in which one or both of the parents hold good jobs. The neighborhood consists mainly of single family dwellings, built by Irish and Jewish residents a half century ago. Some have been converted to house more than one family. During the past fifteen years the neighborhood has become entirely Black, and it is these working-class Black families who make up the school community.

The Principal. The principal, an Italo-American native of South Philadelphia, has been at Shortridge for 10 years. Prior to coming he had been vice-principal of a school experiencing a great deal of racial unrest. He distinguished himself, in the eyes of the community and the school district administration, by the skill with which he handled the racial crisis. The respect he gained there followed him to Shortridge.

As a principal he is proud of his school's role in the community. Although he does not reside in the city and neither he nor his staff are much in evidence in the area after school hours, the school is a focal point of community activity. Indeed, it is the central and most visible institution, serving more than any other to give a sense of identity to the community. The principal has been very careful to cultivate ties not only with the parents of his students, but with other influential members of the neighborhood.

Not surprisingly, the community relationship to the school is reactive, while the principal's style of interaction with the community would be proactive. He does not hide the fact that he dislikes surprises. His school and office are open to parents and visitors and this contact serves to keep him abreast of problems before they get serious. Through all of his school-community programs he tries to stay a step ahead, to offer before he is asked. In this way he maintains control of the relationship and presents himself as a knowledgeable leader.

He sees the school as an outpost of middle-class culture. His goal is to help as many of the children as possible acquire the trappings of that culture. The success of this mission, he firmly believes, requires that he operate from a position of power. About this he is articulate and certain. The quick and effective solution to problems demands not only that they be anticipated but that decisive action be forthcoming. Any move from within the school, from the city administration or from outside that he sees as a threat to his power is quickly addressed.

By most accounts he is a success. He has received several community awards, and the school has been featured in a national publication as a "school that works." He is proudest, however, of the advances his school has made in the city ranking of reading scores, and the number of students who go on to prestigious junior or senior high schools.

Development of literacy skills are seen as central to what he believes is his mission. He proudly proclaims himself an expert in teaching literacy. The school under his direction has participated in a number of innovative language arts programs.

The Goods. Key to the use of reading and writing skills as "goods" is the academics plus program in the school. This program consists of special classes open to selected "good" students and is designed both to challenge and to reward them. Shortridge, which had been a K-5 school until a sixth "academics plus" grade was added, offers the option beginning with the fourth grade.

The appeal and the power of academics plus finds its roots in the secondary school scene in Philadelphia. Students are offered the choice of two elite schools (one for boys and one for girls), very good academic schools, specialized vocational schools, traditional general schools and one school-without-walls. Competition is heavy for admission to the "better" schools as well as for some of the private schools in the area.

Selection to academics plus is seen by parents and touted by the school as increasing one's chances of getting into a "good" school later. The competition starts before children enroll in kindergarten when parents are urged to participate in the school sponsored reading readiness programs. Throughout the early grades it is used as a carrot both to motivate kids to read and to insure that they and their parents develop a "proper attitude" toward school.

The negotiation and the contract. Negotiations start after the teachers have selected students for participation to the program and these choices have been approved by the principal. Officially, selection is open to "good" students, though the major criterion is attitude.

Appropriate attitude, a complex issue, includes not having been a discipline problem and being cooperative and dependable. In addition, the role parents have played in school-life is important in the display of proper attitude. They must be seen as cooperative and caring by having attended parent-teacher conferences and sending their children to school well-dressed, well-fed, well-rested and with signed homework assignments completed.

Formal negotiations take place in a meeting between the principal and parents whose children have been chosen to participate. The principal says something like:

> "We will do our best to see to it that your children learn to read and write well and will work to get them into good junior and senior high schools if you will work with us."

Working with them means regularly monitoring the children's homework, following a year round program in literacy at home, sending the children to school dressed appropriately, attending parent-teacher conferences, and cooperating with respect to discipline.

The parents are then required to sign a formal agreement containing these provisions. The next year students will be assigned to a special classroom and teacher and will be expected to work at an accelerated pace. Breech of the agreement can result in a student being either put into a regular classroom or not invited to continue for the next grade. Fifth graders who are not selected to the program for the sixth grade must leave Shortridge.

The Results. This case suggests how, through a single program rooted in the community's cultural values on literacy, a principal is able to achieve several goals. He can control the relationship of the school to the community, effectively demand a display of certain attitudes and behaviors, and preclude a number of problems from developing. Through it all he is consolidating and expanding his own power both to influence the behavior of students and parents and to make unpopular decisions of his own. This scenario is possible because the school appears to control a highly valued commodity: access to facility with reading and writing. Other scenarios, where the participants have different agenda, have been encountered in other school communities. Each has as its basis the amenability of reading and writing (as well as other school-taught skills) to negotiation as a kind of currency.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Most teachers and parents have been enculturated into the conventional culture of school literacy. They view reading and writing as essentially cognitive phenomena, and for them the evidence is persuasive. Certain types of kids do not do well on reading tests, nor do they give much evidence of wanting to read and write. Even more telling is the evidence provided by those cases where traditional approaches have produced successes; where reading scores have gone up and where children have stopped misbehaving, have learned to love learning and have graduated to successful adult careers.

At the same time, viewing reading and writing in the real world from the perspective of the culture of literacy reveals a set of processes that educators and layfolk alike have not been aware of. For one, major tasks being performed by schools have little to do with learning literacy skills, and for another, children are able to acquire these pretty much apart from school efforts, or even despite them. In this light, I propose the following as implications for practice emerging from our present understanding of reading and writing in the real world:

1. A new understanding of children. Viewing literacy primarily as a cognitive phenomenon leads to a view of children as little more than repositories of competencies. The major concern of schooling becomes the provision, measurement, ranking and enhancement of these competencies. It can be argued that this is simply a fiction. However, the realities of the school culture too often lead to the acceptance of this fiction as reality. It is a short step to believing that what we see children display in classroom interactions, written assignments, oral recitations and tests is what the children are.

   In contrast, the perspective presented here leads us to view children as innately adapting, always seeking to make sense of their world. Thus, they are defined by a delicate and intricate web of relata that extends beyond the classroom in a number of dimensions most of which are not accessible to scrutiny by teachers. Intrustion into this is only done with the utmost sensitivity to the unanticipated risks it might entail.

2. A sensitivity to children's culture of literacy. In a paper analyzing "stepping rhymes" used by children, Gilmore (1981) describes one that begins, "Gimmee room." An important characteristic of this genre of children's "play," she notes, is the use of names, which she sees as a tendency to personalize. We would be well served to listen closely to this and other clues children offer to their subculture. Just as the school's culture of literacy is determinant of how we teach and evaluate reading and writing, so the child's subculture is a major influence on what he or she does or does not do. Of particular importance is the intricate and complex relationship children develop with peers. Only recently have researchers seriously examined children's subcultures where, undoubtedly, the source of many "reading and writing" problems will be found.

3. A new appreciation of community. More school people are seeing themselves as aliens on foreign terrain. From a culture of literacy perspective this is almost never the case. While the relationship between the school and the families it serves may be one of several types, it is always vital. Active engagement in teaching as a process negotiated between community members can lead to its assuming a new significance. Viewing teaching as participation in a community activity can at the same time alleviate the isolation many teachers feel and give them a sharpened sense of what their student's real needs are. This latter can also have the additional effect of removing much of the dependence upon outside expertise for answers to questions about discipline, motivation and technique.

4. A pedagogy that "gives room." If reading and writing are in fact adaptive responses, the request of Gilmore's "stepping" girls to "Gimme room!" can be seen as more than a clue to their subculture. It can be taken as a plea for a new way of teaching. Traditional views of pedagogy view technique as basic. We want to know "what are the best ways to enhance competencies?" and we want methods to insure that they are displayed to maximum advantage and are fairly evaluated.

Seeing learning as adaptation removes the onus from technique. It puts the emphasis on leaving room for learning. It means making allowances for alternative learning styles, giving opportunity for careful rehearsing before work is displayed in assignments, recitations or tests, for example. It may mean tolerating some apparent chaos or having our own sensitivities inadvertently affronted.

In short, this approach calls for extreme sensitivity before intervening in the delicate web of relata defining the child. However, this is not necessarily the same sensitivity a fine mechanic displays in tuning a motor, a sensitivity born of fear that a false move might upset the functioning of the mechanism. Children are above all human and sometimes it is necessary to risk upsetting the smooth functioning of the system for the good of the child.

# APPENDIX B

## SYMPOSIA, COLLOQUIA, WORKSHOPS AND ARTICLES MAKING DIRECT USE OF FINDINGS FROM THIS RESEARCH

(Partial listing)

## COLLOQUIA, SYMPOSIA AND WORKSHOPS

3/81 Second Annual University of Pennsylvania Ethnography and Education Research Forum.
Symposium: "From Research to Practice" (Smith)
Symposium: "Language Use." (Gilmore / Schieffelin)

4/81 Association for Educational Communication and Technology.
Symposium: "Ethnography and Ed. Technology" (Gilmore/Smith)

5/81 Columbia Teachers College. Colloquium with Lichter Project (Funded by NIE.) (Gilmore/Smith)

7/81 Weeklong institute for the Office of Research and Evaluation, The Philadelphia School District. (Gilmore/Smith)

9/81-5/82 Weekly Literacy Brown Bag Lunch, Organized by Smith and D. Wagner to facilitate sharing of research on literacy, University of Pennsylvania, Graduate School of Education.

10/81 Two day workshop with the Harvard Literacy Project of C. Snow and the Penn Moroccan Project of D. Wagner. Organized by Schieffelin

11/81 Two day research workshop for Graduate School of Education, Off-Campus Programs. (Gilmore/Smith)

11/81 Workshop with F. Thompson and staff, BOCES, New York Dept. of Education. (Smith)

12/81 Workshop for teachers and research staff of Sondra Perl's Writing Research Project, Wading Rock, N.Y. (Smith)

1/82 West Chester State College, Colloquium: "Ethnography and Literacy related Problems." (Smith)

3/82 Luzerne County Reading Association, Workshop: "What Ethnography Can Tell Us About Reading." (Smith)

3/82 Third Annual University of Pennsylvania Ethnography in Educational Research Forum.
Symposium: "Literacy Research" (Gilmore, Robinson, Schieffelin, Weinstein)

4/82 Rutgers University, Symposium: "Ethnography and Graduate Education." (Gilmore/Smith)

PAPERS

| | |
|---|---|
| 3/81 | Gilmore. "Spelling Mississippi: Recontextualization of a Literacy Related speech Event" Second Penn Forum |
| 4/81 | Gilmore. "Language and Affect in Literacy Research" at The Association for Educational Communication and Technology, Annual Meeting, Philadelphia. |
| 5/81 | Gilmore. "Spell Mississippi Right Now!" at The Youth Folk Arts Festival. Philadelphia. |
| 5/81 | Smith. "The Relational View of Schooling" at Graduate School of Education, U. of Pennsylvania, Faculty Colloquium. |
| 10/81 | Gilmore. "Language and Literacy Competencies as Educational Resources." Gruaduate School of Education, Educators' Day. |
| 10/81 | Smith. "Doing the Ethnography of Literacy." Graduate School of Education, Educators' Day. |
| 11/81 | Gilmore. "Admission to Literacy in Elementary School." Graduate School of Education, Literacy Brown Bag Lunch. |
| 11/81 | Smith. "The Culture of Literacy: Issues in Applying the Construct." Graduate School of Education, Literacy Brown Bag. |
| 11/81 | Smith. "Reading and Writing Outside of School: Findings and Research Issues." Beaver College Faculty Student Colloquium. |
| 3/82 | Smith. "Surprise! Traditional Literacy is Alive and Well." University of Maryland Conference on New Literacies. |
| 3/82 | Gilmore/Schieffelin. "Privacy, Pride and Pronouncement: The Study of Literacy in Adolescent Girls." Third Penn Forum. |
| 3/82 | Smith. "The Education of Ethnography." Keynote Address, The Third Penn Forum. |
| 3/82 | Weinstein. "Some Social Consequences of Literacy." Third Penn Forum. |
| 3/82 | Smith. "What Ethnography of Literacy Can Teach Educators." Phi Delta Kappa, Philadelphia Chapter. |
| 4/82 | Schieffelin. "Literacy Research and Southeast Asians in Elementary School." Graduate School of Education, Literacy Brown Bag Lunch. |

## ARTICLES

1982 Gilmore and Smith. "Ethnography and Education: Comment On Two Issues." The Linguistic Reporter. Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, D.C.

1982 Gilmore and Smith. "The State of The Art in Ethnography and Education: A Retrospective Discussion." Children in and Out of School. Gilmore, Perry and Allan Glatthorn, Eds. Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, D.C.

1982 Smith. "Reading and Writing in the Real World: Explorations into the Culture of LIteracy." Developing Literacy: Young Children's Use of Language. Parker Robert P. and Frances A. Davis, Eds. International Reading Association, Newark, DE.

1982 Smith. "The Ethnographic Monitoring of Language Arts Skill Acquisition: General. Findings." The Generator. American Educational Research Association.

1982 Smith. "Ethnographic Monitoring: A Way to Understand By Those Who Are Making Schooling Work." The Generator. American Educational Research Association.

## FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS AND ACTIVITIES

Fall/82 Gilmore. "Silence and Sulking and the Literacy Development of of Children." in Tannen, Deborah and Muriel Saville-Troike, eds. The Functions of Silence.

7/82 Smith. "Counting the Cost in Literacy Acquisition." Paper to be presented at the International Psychological Association, Edinboro, Scotland. (Invited participant)

In Prep. Schieffelin, (ed) The Acquisition of Literacy: Ethnographic Perspectives. Articles by Gilmore, Schieffelin, Smith and Weinstein.

7/82 Graduate School of Education, Week-long Institute, "Ethnography for Practitioners: Exporing the Culture of Literacy." Gilmore and Smith.

Fall/82 Proceedings of the Third Annual Penn Forum, Richard Blot, Ed. Papers by Smith, Weinstein, Gilmore and Schieffelin.

## DISSERTATIONS

5/82 Gilmore (Ph.D.) The Right to Read: Admission to Literacy.

8/82 Watkins (Ed.D.) Parent Perceptions of School Expectations and the Acquisition of Literacy Skills.